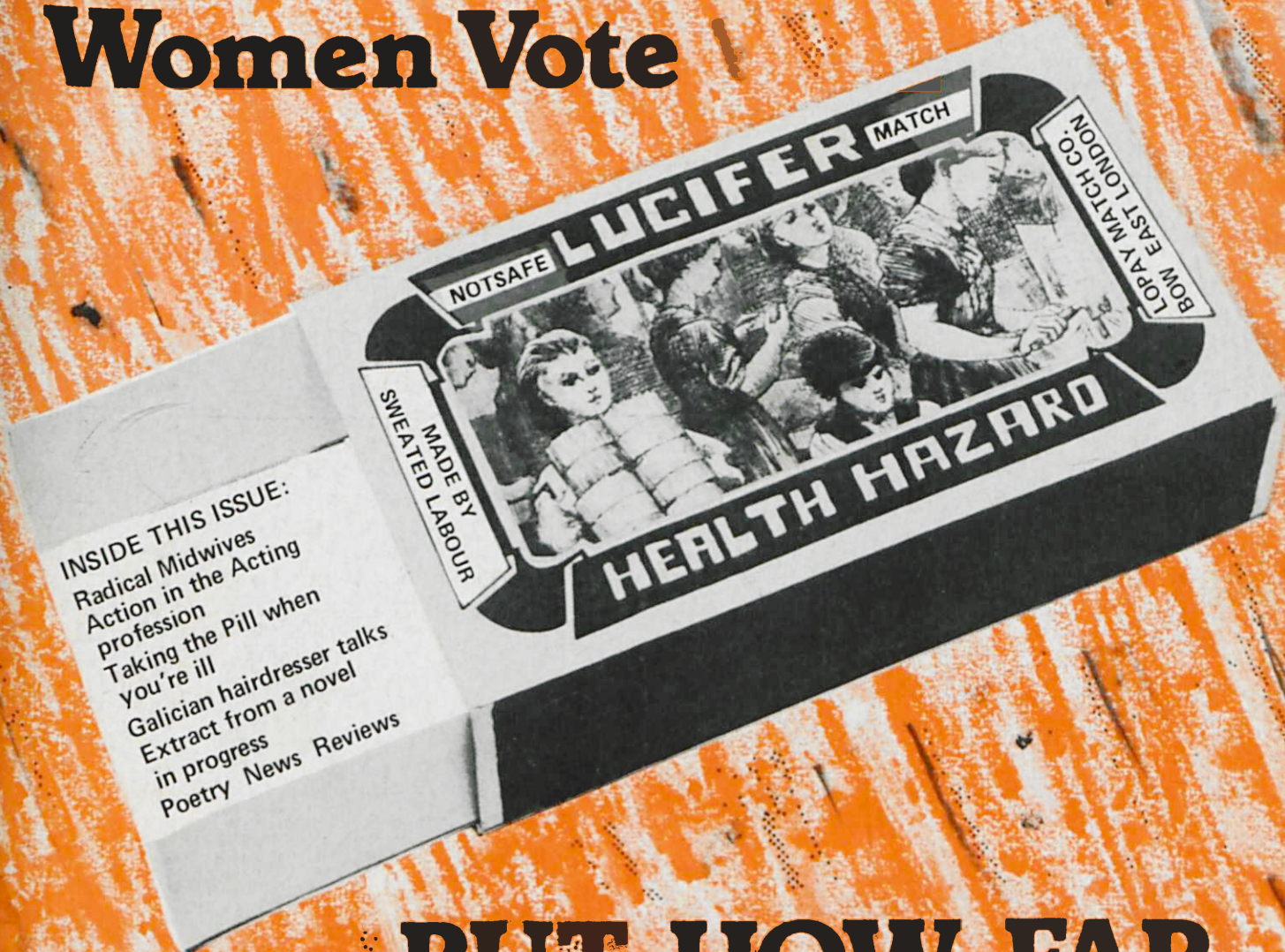


spare Rib

P523/344
A women's liberation
magazine
August 78
No. 73
35p

**90 YEARS AGO...
Matchgirls Strike**

**50 YEARS AGO...
Women Vote**



**...BUT HOW FAR
HAVE WE COME...**



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- * The TUC estimates there are 600,000 unemployed women.
- * Sex Discrimination and Equal Opportunity legislation is patchy and in urgent need of extension.
- * Cuts in public spending have slashed job opportunities for women and attacked the provision of nurseries and social services.

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for REAL equality**



National Union of Public Employees

Civic House, Aberdeen Terrace, London, SE3

Editorial

Spare Rib looks at 50 years
of women's suffrage



FREE AND INDEPENDENT.

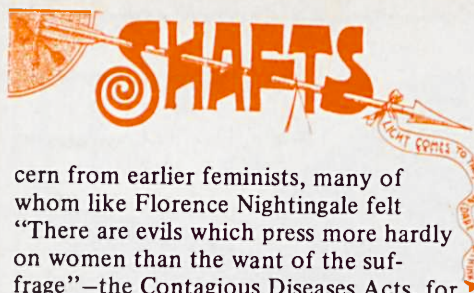
THE THREE LEADERS (together). "WANT A PILOT, MADAM?"
NEW VOTER. "NO, THANKS."

1928 year of the "Flapper Vote", when women under 30 were finally allowed to the polls. 1978, year of a large, official, government-backed celebration: "There has been enormous progress since the 'chains and railings' days of the suffragette campaign. Women can be justly proud of the major social changes brought about in the past half-century". But what were the reactions of women at the time? We decided to look at *Spare Rib*'s forerunners, the early feminist magazines, to see if they concentrated mainly on the vote or (like *Spare Rib*) went far beyond concern with civil rights.

The Common Cause, put out by the

giant National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies numbering 100,000 members, greeted the Flapper Vote with no grateful tears or triumphant banner-waving. Just the cartoon above—a quick laugh and a hopeful zoom off into the more self-sufficient future. The suffragists certainly didn't only speak—or write—about the vote. The NUWSS concentrated especially on education and propaganda. They linked the vote to a whole lot of problems we're still up against today, like the inequities of marriage or the difficulties of breaking into male-dominated professions (Florence Nagle, aged 83, is still waiting outside the doors of the Kennel Club). . .

The suffragists inherited areas of con-



cern from earlier feminists, many of whom like Florence Nightingale felt "There are evils which press more hardly on women than the want of the suffrage"—the Contagious Diseases Acts, for instance, which aimed to set up a legalised brothel system and which deprived suspected prostitutes of all civil rights. Feminists fought back after 1870 with their paper, *The Shield*. Today we're still fighting the arrogance of the medical profession.

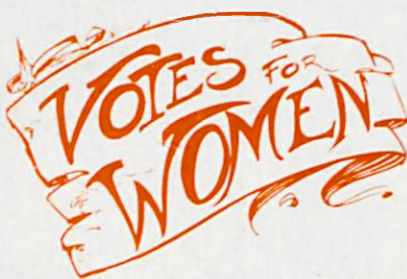
The feminist press has been with us since *The Englishwoman's Journal*, founded in 1858 well before the struggle for the vote; although it's worth remembering that the first women's suffrage bill was presented, together with a massive petition, in 1866. Lydia Becker's *Women's Suffrage Journal* kept the fight for the vote alive in the 20 depressing years that followed, when bill after bill was blocked, talked out or rejected and the number of dedicated suffragists seemed dwindling away. At the same time though, these were great years for women's publications linking feminism to all kinds of new ideas. *Shafts*, for instance, "a magazine for women and the working class", was anti-vivisection, vegetarian and Theosophist as well as advocating universal suffrage.

The Victoria Magazine is one of the most interesting for us, because it was produced entirely by women, financed its own press and trained women printers for other papers as well as its own. As the magazine developed and the scope of women's problems became more visible, it branched into a new paper, *Women at Work*. Because, as the American Susan Anthony was pointing out in her speeches, "by itself, the ballot is not even a crust, a crumb".

The development of *The Victoria Magazine* seems to have been a common one; feminist writers of that time who began with a wide range of concerns came gradually to consider women's economic independence to be the most important issue. Annie Besant's *Link*, for instance, made its first big impact in 1877 by publicising birth control information—never a safe move; Besant was prosecuted, and 90 years later *Spare Rib* was banned in

factory, and supported the women working there when they came out on strike. 90 years on, we revisit the Match Girls in this issue of *Spare Rib*.

With the turn of the century came a big upsurge of women's militancy and with it a new women's press, still pressing for power on every front—political, cultural, sexual, economic. For the new political strategy—the brilliantly produced and publicised *Votes for Women*, best-selling paper of the militant Women's Social and Political Union. For the new culture—a spate of articles, novels, letters to newspapers from the Women Writers Suffrage League; new plays, pageants, performances from the Actresses' Suffrage League. For sexual liberation, *The Freewoman* broke ground on unmarried motherhood, lesbianism and the female orgasm. For a new economic system, Sylvia Pankhurst's *Woman's Dreadnought* linked women's struggles at work with



conditions in the home, as the movement tries to do today. She was one of the first to see that childcare was a central problem, setting up a nursery in an old pub, "The Mother's Arms". *The Dreadnought* combined close attention to local women's lives with an exciting international perspective, eye-witness reports from as far apart as Hungary and Australia.

But the magazine which came closest to the way feminists are thinking today was probably *The Women's Freedom League's The Vote*, which despite its name was anything but a single-issue paper; it opposed oppression everywhere (even in Ireland, though the League's President was a sister of the British garrison commander!) and aimed at sweeping changes even in women's dress (we may not still have to wear corsets all the year round to be 'respectable', but we still have to fight to wear comfortable clothes to work). The Women's Freedom League pioneered imaginative guerilla action for other militants to follow, and set an absolute value on grass-roots democracy: they would have agreed with us that "no woman speaks for the movement, each of us speaks for herself". And they went on fighting right up till 1960 when they were attacking the Wolfenden report on prostitution.

The Women's liberation movement might be said to be carrying on a long tradition. At the Department of the Environment's commemorative gathering on 2nd June, we were there in suffragette colours to talk about the things the vote hasn't given us, things that women were fighting for then as well as now. We handed out an open letter to the suffragettes who'd been in-



vited: Dear Sisters, We are writing to you because you will understand how angry we are. One hundred years after the first feminist movement was started, fifty years after we were given the vote, women are still not free. What are we being asked to celebrate? That after many years of intense struggle on your parts, a process during which you were systematically attacked and worn down by the male establishment, women won the vote—a minute part of what you were asking for. Then, as now, focussing on the vote—in our childhood history books as much as in these 50th anniversary celebrations—diverts attention away from changes that would materially affect the position of women. Instead we get those small concessions which the male establishment considers it reasonable—or useful—to give us. Eight years after men gave us the Equal Pay Act (do not be misled, there are still only 27 women MPs), the average male wage is £78.60, the average female wage is £51.00. Three years after the Sex Discrimination Act became law, it is still impossible for young women to get equal education in school or to have equal access to trade apprenticeships, or for older women to get equal consideration for jobs—and these are things that are supposedly within the power of the law—the vote—to give us.

In order to achieve women's liberation, we intend to take those things that no male law will ever give. We will walk down any street without being assaulted and raped. We will live in our own homes without being battered by the men we live with. We will live with other women, as lovers, if we choose. We will not bear sole responsibility for the housework or childcare. We will not take the burden, unpaid, in the home, of caring for the victims of cuts in the Welfare State whilst our sisters in the public sector are thrown out of paid work. We will not be labelled as mad when we protest—twice as many women as men are labelled as psychiatrically ill, and women are prescribed twice as many psychotropic (i.e. mood-changing) drugs as men. We will not be confronted on every hoarding, in every newspaper and on every TV screen by images of ourselves as ideal sex symbol, ideal mother, ideal servant, the product of male fantasies we are incapable and unwilling to fulfil.

These are only some of the issues we are organising around; they are elements of all our lives which we as women of all ages are angry about, and which will never be changed by Act of Parliament. We want to make it clear that no feminist 50 years ago thought that getting the vote was the end of the struggle. We haven't won—we've only just begun!

The
suffragette

EDITED BY CHRISTABEL PANKHURST
The Official Organ of the Women's Social and Political Union
FRIDAY, MAY 2, 1913



RAIDED!!

**Spare Rib
BANNED!! 1977**

the Republic of Ireland for doing the same thing. Besant went on fighting, too. In 1888, she ran an expose of the hideous conditions in Bryant and May's match

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Spare Rib is produced collectively by Anny Brackx, Alison Fell, Susan Hemmings, Sue Hobbs, Pat Kahn, Laura Margolis, Jill Nicholls, Rosie Parker, Ruthie Petrie, Angela Phillips, Linda Phillips, Janie Prince, Amanda Sebestyen, Carole Spedding, Ruth Wallsgrove.

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Letters

Write to 27 Clerkenwell
Close, London EC1

Please keep letters short so we can print a variety of opinions.

Please send your full name and address with the letter, so that we can reply and/or forward letters to you.

* indicates letters have been cut for reasons of space

Ride On, Sisters

Dear *Spare Rib*,
Finally something about motorbikes in *Spare Rib* (Ride On, SR 72). I feel that women like me who ride bikes aren't doing enough to challenge the 'macho' stronghold in the motorbike world.

It is irritating the way motorbike magazines are obviously written entirely for men. Somewhere in any of the magazines there is something that demonstrates a certain kind of male cultist attitude — the daredevil, speed king, self-consciously rough; into dope, booze, 'birds' and reckless living.

An article in *Bike* magazine (June '78) at least acknowledges the increasing numbers of women riders. In this, I "learned" that the new breed of women riders aren't "closet dykes", do wear "frilly underwear", aren't "swaddled" in sensible, functional "Belstaff jackets and butch boots" and can even be "pretty serious about having fun on bikes. That is pretty and serious. . ."

I also "learned" that women are "running the whole crazy ballgame" because it is the "love of, the lack of, the need of a woman that compels a man to do whatever it is he feels he has to do. . ."

Well, I guess what I should do now is write a letter to *Bike* magazine.
in sisterhood,
Carolyn Skelton,
London SW11.

Free the People

Dear *Spare Rib*,
With reference to the recent Women's Liberation Conference which demanded the release of all women prisoners in Iran: my immediate response is firstly, why *should* the women be released when the men are still imprisoned? And secondly, if I were released *because I was a woman*, I'd be furious. If my imprisonment had been political I'd feel I was betraying my male comrades and that my political

stand was not being recognised because I was female.

Surely it would be more productive (and less insulting to women) to work together with men on this and collectively demand a total release of all political prisoners. Let's put an end to the eternal and pathetic cry of 'women and children first'.

In sisterhood,
Fiona Shaw,
Brighton.

*Greece — too euphoric

Dear *Spare Rib*,
I am rather disturbed by the rosy picture of women's liberation in Greece (SR 71). I lived and worked in Greece from 1973-76 and visited Athens again in March 1978. Like many others, I was almost intoxicated with the spirit that prevailed in the immediate post-dictatorship period. But it is only too clear that the women's movement faces appalling problems. Most groups are, if not directly affiliated to political parties, run by activists who are party members. I do not doubt their commitment or sincerity, but I do think that this situation makes the women's movement open to all the problems faced by the left parties. It makes independence more difficult. And it inevitably leads to sectarianism.

The political situation in Greece has become less stable and more repressive since the early days of post-junta euphoria. The fortunes of the women's movement are indissolubly linked to those of the Greek left and everyone involved knows that the outlook is far from bright.

Why not explain what's happening in the vase paintings? In the fifth century especially, vases were often made for rich men to give to their wives and daughters, and they often show the recipients at work or play. The illustration on p18, for instance, shows a woman being dressed for her marriage. The door on the right symbolises the threshold of her husband's home; the veil, wreath and vase are all part of the ritual. On p17, it shows women fetching water from a public fountain; in the early days this was always a woman's job, but by the 5th century it was done by female slaves.
In sisterhood,
Elizabeth Wright,
London N1.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 20 ►

Radical Midwives



“We need to add to our woman-tending, not machine-tending skills.”

Members of the Association of Radical Midwives, formed to fight the phasing out of midwifery, explain what the midwife's role is now and what it could be.

The word ‘midwife’ comes from the Anglo-Saxon ‘with woman’. There have always been women who have attended other women in childbirth, and down the ages these women have been under attack.* At times they were classed as witches and put to death. Attempts have been made consistently by men in powerful positions, such as priest or medicine man, to destroy the midwife, and take control of the birth process—an essentially female process.

In 1902 the Central Midwives Board (CMB) was set up as a statutory body to supervise the training and practice of midwifery. This board was not run by midwives, but greatly dominated by obstetricians. However, midwifery was recognised as a profession. Once trained and put on the roll of midwives, a midwife became respectable and was a skilled practitioner in her own right.

Meanwhile medical science has become more technical. The whole process of labour and delivery can now be initiated, controlled and completed by doctors and their technology. Control over bodily processes is often substituted for understanding of those processes. Admittedly, many medical advances in obstetrics have helped detect and alleviate problems as

they arise. But these successes do not warrant indiscriminate use of medical technology in maternity care. In fact technical interference in the normal physiological process may well carry more risks than advantages to the mother and baby.

The use of a hormone drip to ‘accelerate’ labour puts the woman at risk of constant strong contractions, which could lead to rupture of the uterus and to the death of the baby due to oxygen deprivation. Monitoring equipment attached to the mother and unborn baby, often used to prevent the risks of accelerated labour occurring, can itself disturb the labour by stopping the mother from making herself comfortable in the position that suits her, and so increasing her need for pain-relieving drugs, which carry their own risks to mother and baby.

These trends inevitably mean the phasing out of basic midwifery skills, such as helping women to cope with the pain of labour, feeling the strength and frequency of contractions, listening to the baby's heart beat, knowing when normal is becoming abnormal. As these skills are phased out, so is the midwife. Instead the teaching hospitals are breeding obstetric nurses to be handmaidens to the obstetricians and their technology.

This means that the choices open to women having babies are becoming narrower and narrower; choices as to where she gives birth, how she gives birth, who is with her, how and when she feeds her baby.

A small group of women, some midwives, others training or about to start training, got together early in 1976 to share their discontent and frustration and their hopes. A few came from the States and Canada, where midwifery was virtually stamped out years ago, though the legal position varies from state to state. In order to learn the skills they had to come to Britain. They were shocked to find that here too midwifery was dying a slow death and that maternity care was becoming very similar to the dehumanised treatment the other side of the Atlantic.

Gradually the group grew by word of mouth and we began to meet every six weeks in different parts of the country. At first our weekends were filled with ‘horror stories’ (as we call them). But we'd be relieved to see each other and know we were with people who felt the same. For a weekend we were no longer isolated; we could shout and scream and laugh and bawl about our situations.

Where midwives work

Midwives are employed by the Area Health Authorities and paid by the NHS. They are trained in schools of midwifery attached to maternity units, in the same way that nurses are trained, but with a period of time working on the district with a district midwife.

Once qualified you can be a district or a hospital midwife, though generally you are required to gain some hospital

* In SR 49 Christine Beels looks at past and present attempts to take childbirth out of the hands of midwives. She shows how, after the Renaissance, men's fear of women caring for women was intensified as male surgeons and physicians began to take up obstetrics as a speciality. Copies available from *Spare Rib* at 40p inc. postage.



Midwife working with one-hour-old baby while older brother looks at early pictures of himself

experience before going on the district. District midwives are given the rank of 'sister'. In hospital you are not made a 'sister' until you have gained some experience as a 'staff midwife'. A midwife who has just been made a 'sister', either on the district or in hospital, is paid £2,706 plus an extra £312 a year and a yearly supplement of 5%.

In 1976-7 there were 21,000 midwives who notified the CMB of their intention to practise. (Every midwife has to do this at the beginning of each year.) They may be practising full- or part-time. In 1975 there were 3,600 full-time district midwives.

Midwives work with women through pregnancy, labour and for 28 days following the birth. If it were possible for midwives to follow the same woman right through the process, midwives would get more job satisfaction and, we think, women would have far better care.

However, as a hospital midwife, you work in either ante-natal, delivery or post-natal; you very rarely see one woman through all three. As a district midwife, you may give some ante-natal care with a GP if s/he holds an ante-natal clinic. You may be lucky enough to do one or two home deliveries or do some deliveries at a GP unit or even in a consultant unit. But most of your work is post-natal care, visiting women who have come home from hospital. These visits are required by law to be done daily for ten days after delivery and then up to 28 days if this is felt necessary by midwife and mother.

Post-natal work can be very rewarding but, on its own, not as satisfying as giving continual care. The district midwife was once described as someone who is invited to a party just to do the washing up!

District and hospital midwifery is supposed to be being 'integrated'. This seems to mean that district midwives are being assimilated by the hospitals. Hospital midwives are hardly ever known to do any work on the district.

Within the hospital there is a career structure with different rates of pay through which a midwife can rise, ending in teaching and administration. We are critical of the fact that beyond a certain point you can climb no further up the ladder without ceasing to practise midwifery.

Training—"like going back to school"

For those of us who were direct entry student midwives—ie with no previous nurse training—to come into midwifery was like going back to school. On the very first day, you put on your uniform and are called nurse so and so. Immediately your identity is taken away and you assume a submissive role in the hierarchy.

The course, which lasts two years for direct entry students, one for SRNs and one and a half years for SENs (though it's

about to be lengthened), is organised so that you spend a very short time on each ward. So by the time you have adjusted to the ward staff and their particular routine and are beginning to feel confident in what you are supposed to be doing, you are whisked off somewhere else, just as you feel ready to start making constructive criticism or allowing your personal feelings and views to be known.

But obviously the main barrier against self-expression is the constant threat of not getting qualified—we need that qualification to be able to practise legally.

Those of us who already had nurse training were used to the hierarchy. We'd learned to fear the consequences of standing up for ourselves. But training as midwives, many of us thought, we would acquire a skill of which we were 'practitioners in our own right', not just helping out doctors. It was soon apparent that we were not going to be taught how to take responsibility and make decisions for ourselves, or how to treat our 'patients' as healthy women, not as sick people totally dependent on us.

Student midwives are deliberately deprived of knowledge and power. They are frequently refused entry to medical students' lectures and even to hospital libraries. One student midwife wished to report a midwife who had treated a woman violently during labour. The midwife had in fact had nine previous complaints against her—this one would have brought about her dismissal. But when the student reported it to the nursing officer above



Ante-natal clinic, London

her she was not informed that for her complaint to be acknowledged she had to hand in a written report within seven days. So no action was taken and the student was herself ostracised by the rest of the midwifery staff.

Fragmented care

Having gained a midwifery qualification, we are kept very much in the confines of NHS bureaucracy. It is difficult to get jobs on the district. In hospitals we are immediately given administrative tasks on the wards and have little time to practise our new skills and little consistent contact with child-bearing women. In ante-natal clinics we are given the joyful job of chaperoning the obstetricians—rushing women in and out of cubicles and taking their blood pressure. The rest is left to the obstetrician, even in many cases where there are no abnormalities in the pregnancy.

So care is fragmented and the midwife's fragment is seen by all concerned as insignificant. The midwife's confidence in her own skills is undermined. The mother is made to feel she is merely an appendage to her uterus, which is proceeding through the hospital on a conveyor belt. If on the other hand midwives could take total responsibility for more women, the doctor would have more time to see any women with complications.

For the more experienced midwife, the labour ward is a humiliating place where she must take orders from inexper-

enced house doctors. If district midwives are invited into hospital to do a delivery, they are usually interfered with so that now many refuse to take on hospital deliveries.

One district midwife attending a woman in hospital left her for half an hour while she went for lunch. She was quite satisfied with the woman's condition. When she returned, 'someone' had decided that the labour was taking too long (the woman herself had not complained) and had set up a hormone drip to 'accelerate' labour. So the midwife was no longer attending a normal labour: she was now nursing a high-risk patient, and all without any consultation or respect for her own judgement. This is ironic as labouring women in the care of the hospital obstetric services are much more likely to be left alone than those in the care of the district midwife.

Kept in ignorance

It is upsetting and exhausting to have to stand powerlessly and see women deprived of the information and choices that are their right. In the labour ward, it sometimes becomes difficult for the midwife herself to remember that this woman is experiencing something unique in her life and that she has a life and home, family and friends. Too often childbirth becomes a routine procedure, monitored on graphs, unrelated to the world outside. On the post-natal ward everything is still beyond the woman's control. One wanted to feed

her baby during the night, but in that particular hospital it was not policy for women to feed their babies on the first night after they were born—they should be asleep. She was told by the auxiliary nurse (evidently in fear and trembling of her superiors) that she couldn't because it would 'upset sister'. Who was most upset we wonder?

Women who can't stand being in hospital any longer find it hard to discharge themselves. Dire warnings are usually given about the possible consequences to the baby and the guilt the mother would feel for the rest of her life. This, despite the safe and adequate care available from the district midwifery service and local GP.

Once home and in the care of the district midwife, it becomes clear what sort of ignorance women are kept in. One woman was so thankful that she'd had her baby in hospital; otherwise, she thought, she might have died. In fact it turns out she might have died *because* she was in hospital under the care of the doctors.

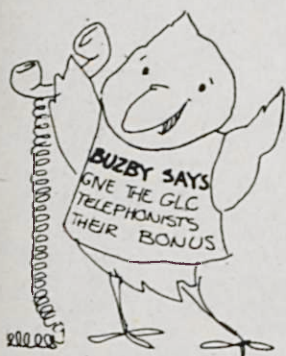
She had had a caesarian section with her first baby. They induced labour for her second pregnancy. (That is risky in itself because hormone induced contractions can be very strong indeed and so be dangerous to the scar on her uterus from the caesarian section.) They also gave her epidural anaesthesia. (This meant that she could feel nothing at all from the waist down, and so would not be able to

continued on page 32

AIM HIGH!

Paddington Women's Group are to get £27,000 this year from Urban Aid to open a women's centre – £14,000 capital, and £13,000 a year for five years' running costs. They want it to be a place for all local women to drop in – to relax, do woodwork, do their washing, meet, have their kids looked after by paid nursery workers, eat communally... they're still developing their plans. The grant includes money for a colour TV and stereo!

The women's group applied for the money with the help of Voluntary Action Westminster, a local voluntary work organisation, and with the support of the local councillors, even the Conservatives. **North Paddington Women's Centre: temporary address 115 Portnall Road, London W9.**



DAY TIME TELEPHONISTS at the Greater London Council's County Hall, all but one of them women, have been on strike since June 5. They are paid on a scale two grades lower than the evening shift... which is mostly men. The basic rate for the men is higher than that even of a daytime supervisor. Although evening hours are 'un-social', the women point out that, not surprisingly, they deal with 80% more calls in the day. They have very low status, and at the moment are undermanned and overworked. But the Staff Association at the GLC, far from helping them, is claiming that the dispute is just NALGO (the government workers' union) getting at them...C

DUBLIN: An 'Ecumenical Feminist Trust' has been set up by women from different Christian denominations to campaign for the ordination of women throughout Britain and Ireland. It's printing notes to put in collection plates instead of money "in the hope that the equality of women and men



FOUL PLAY

NOTTINGHAM: Despite the hoo-ha in the national press, proclaiming 12-year old-Theresa Bennett's victory against the Football Association, the recent county court awards to Theresa on the basis of sex discrimination will have limited repercussions. The FA is appealing, and anyway Theresa won only because the judge ruled that at her age – before puberty – girls aren't at a physical disadvantage to boys.

After puberty the 'average' woman is physically weaker than the average man – and under the Sex Discrimination Act that means women can be kept out. It seems insane that if a woman is good enough, strong enough, fast enough to be selected for a team – and given male prejudices that means she'd have to be considerably better than any of the men applying – the notion that the *average* woman isn't, is considered relevant. It's not a question of considering the woman's safety, but of men fearing competition and worrying that their own sick sexuality would interfere with their concentration.

Theresa herself would like to play for an under-14 team next season – but she may not be able to as her victory applies only to under-12s.○

KENNEL CLUB AT BAY

Florence Nagle, a leading breeder of Irish wolfhounds is challenging the all-male membership rules of the Kennel Club. Having formally applied to join last December and been turned down, she started proceedings under the Sex Discrimination Act. The case was heard in June but judgement was deferred.

Ms Nagle explained that if a breeder is not registered with the Club "you cannot compete in shows and you cannot register pedigrees. People abroad don't want dogs without pedigrees. And a dog cannot become a champion unless it competes in shows which are all licensed by the Kennel Club."

Two-thirds of those registered with the Club are women, who are mainly responsible for exhibiting, training and breeding pedigree dogs. But women have no say in the running of the Club.

Its defence is that it has been a private club, "a male preserve", since it started in 1874 ("that doesn't make it right" replied Ms Nagle) and that the Club itself – with 320 male members – is merely



social. Florence Nagle's lawyer disputed that, calling the Club "the controlling body of dogdom".

It was Ms Nagle, now 83, who in 1966 forced the Jockey Club to let women hold licences as trainers. "If you take the things women have been barred from, they have never got there unless they fought" she says.○

UNDER-ACHIEVEMENT-OR OPPRESSION?

There we were, 100 or so of us, nearly all women but a select band as entry had been "limited" to "genuine researchers etc" – at the Equal Opportunities Commission/Social Science Research Council's one-day conference on "Women and Under-achievement" at Bradford College on June 23.

The atmosphere at first was one of one-upmanship as we sipped coffee and listened to knowledge-

able conversations going on around us. Then we were told by the chairman, Eric Robinson, that we weren't here to discuss the "emotional" issues associated with women's equality such as "whether girls wear trousers at school" nor to discuss the wider political implications – some people who had wanted to bring up such issues "had not been invited".

With no opening speaker, we were left to find our own level and only gradually got round to challenging the appalling assumptions behind the notion of 'under-achievement' (not oppression) and the fact that the platform (the EOC/SSRC grant-awarding panel) was almost entirely male and the audience female (to which the answer was "You surely don't expect me to answer such an irrelevant comment"). It was not made clear at any point whether the conference was to discuss the whole topic of 'under-achievement' or specific research proposals made to EOC/SSRC.

Dipak Nandy, EOC assistant director, told us they wanted "short-term research with policy pay-offs" – a term which was to become the in-phrase for the day.

We broke for an incredibly sumptuous lunch with sherry and more strawberries than they'll get through on the last day of Wimble-

don, and returned to 'workshops' in the afternoon to find the same problem of lack of 'level' – we tended to go round and round issues, unable to say anything real. (Full marks to Hilary Land who had sub-titled her workshop paper 'Men's under-achievement in the home'.) As a result, workshop reports were patchy and ambiguous (a TUC woman wanted to see CBI more involved in the research – so they can get more info to exploit women?) and people felt restless and confused. Everyone was staggered to hear that you needed to be a 'good chap' to get research money (wry faces – "What's wrong with that?" – "We're not chaps" – "What?" – "WE'RE NOT CHAPS!" – Oh... I see" – ironic applause) and when the chairman attacked Sheila Allen of Bradford viciously for saying we didn't need any more research on the need for day nurseries, about 20 women got up and left.

It was an educational day, but not in the way EOC/SSRC perhaps intended. We certainly learned a lot about their attitudes to women, work and academic structures (they advertised the conference in *New Society* but not in *Spare Rib*) and made vital contacts with other women involved in research and action/research projects with and for women.

The women who discussed writing this report for *Spare Rib* agreed to keep it anonymous because many are hoping to get EOC/SSRC funding for their work! ○

...and lead us
not into
temptation but
deliver us
from evil,
And men!

Sex snoop stir

BOLTON: Three women—divorced or separated from their husbands—made front page news locally by protesting publicly against social security sex snoopers. "They've taken away my benefit money after saying I was co-habiting with a man when I wasn't," said Sandra Longden. "Thanks to them I'm left with £5 a week to feed and clothe myself and my three-year-old son."

Julia Thorpe added, "They told me I shouldn't even start a relationship without telling them." The DHSS cut off Carol Godding's benefit because her husband was visiting the house—because he had legal access to the children!

Bolton Claimants Union have taken up all three cases as part of a national campaign against the co-habitation rule ○

Unfit mother?

LONDON: Joan White, with the support of Women Against Rape, has won custody of three of her four children from Camden Council. She had put them into voluntary, temporary care when she left her home to escape her violent husband and asked for them back when he moved out and she returned home. But the Council said she was an unfit mother, because she had been temporarily living in unsuitable accommodation. . . Not that they had ever tried to find her housing. Nothing else was put forward by Camden as evidence that she was a bad mother.○

Waitresses: hands off!

MADISON, WISC, USA: Eight waitresses at Dos Banditos restaurant, on strike about sexual harassment and favouritism, won all their demands at a meeting with management on April 10.

Ellen Eberle, one of the waitresses, said: "Pete says he never touches 'his girls' but it's not true. He's touched me a number of times and I don't like it and I've told him so. It's perverted and it makes me sick. He's very blatant about it and makes gross jokes."

The waitressing environment tends to isolate the individual worker and enforce competition; women are expected to be sexy and submissive, part of the menu. These women have shown they won't stand for it.○

HARTFORD, USA: Disciplinary action is planned against a judge who dismissed an attempted rape charge saying "you can't blame somebody for trying".

NEW YORK: Instead of trying to act as marriage guidance counselors, police have agreed to arrest husbands who beat their wives. Twelve women sued the Police Department for illegally denying them assistance, and they have now settled out of court. Under the new agreement, the police must respond if a wife calls for help against her husband, arrest the husband if

there's reason to believe he's committed a crime and search for him if he's skipped off — just as they would anyone else suspected of breaking the law.○



In towns all over Holland women demonstrated on the night of May 19 against sexual violence. It was the first 'Reclaim the Night' action in Holland, organised by Women against Sexual Violence, Women Against Rape and other groups, following the German, British and French examples (see SR 61 & 66).

In Amsterdam about 1,500 women marched peacefully with Chinese lanterns and torches through the two nightclub and sex-shop areas. We had drums, songs and we screamed a lot! Men who attacked us were sent off by the police. Later we had a feast at the Women's House.

In Utrecht about 800 marched by torchlight dressed in red (for struggle) and white (for revolt). They were bothered several times and the police did nothing to protect them.

In Rotterdam the police behaved outrageously: when about 300 women wanted to give in a petition about the way raped women are treated by the police, they first met with obscene gestures and threats; later they were severely beaten up by the city police. A woman in parliament has raised questions about this.

In Nijmegen about 1,500 women dressed as witches marched with music and torches. They were attacked by men in cars, who drove into the demonstration, and by others with leaden pipes and other weapons. The police were nowhere to be seen and later refused to see women who wanted to lodge a complaint.

There were marches in eight other towns.

We were very glad that so many women joined in but also sad that there was so much aggression from public and police.○

Report by Vrouwen tegen Seksueel Geweld (Women against Sexual Violence), Postbus 15024, Amsterdam, Holland.

Rape refuge

Edinburgh Rape Crisis Centre opened on July 1, run by a collective of 30 women who aim to provide a confidential service giving support and advice to any woman who has been raped or sexually assaulted. Rape Crisis Centres already exist in London and Glasgow, Bristol and Nottingham.

The Edinburgh centre points out that though the number of prosecutions there is not high, the actual incidence of rape is a lot higher — many rapes are not reported to the police because they are committed by a man or men known to the woman, or because women fear reprisals from the rapist or hostile treatment from police and courts. Primarily a telephone service, the Centre will be open Mon-Fri 6-10pm and Sat 2-10pm on 031-556 9437 or write to PO Box 120, Head Post Office, Edinburgh EH1 3ND.

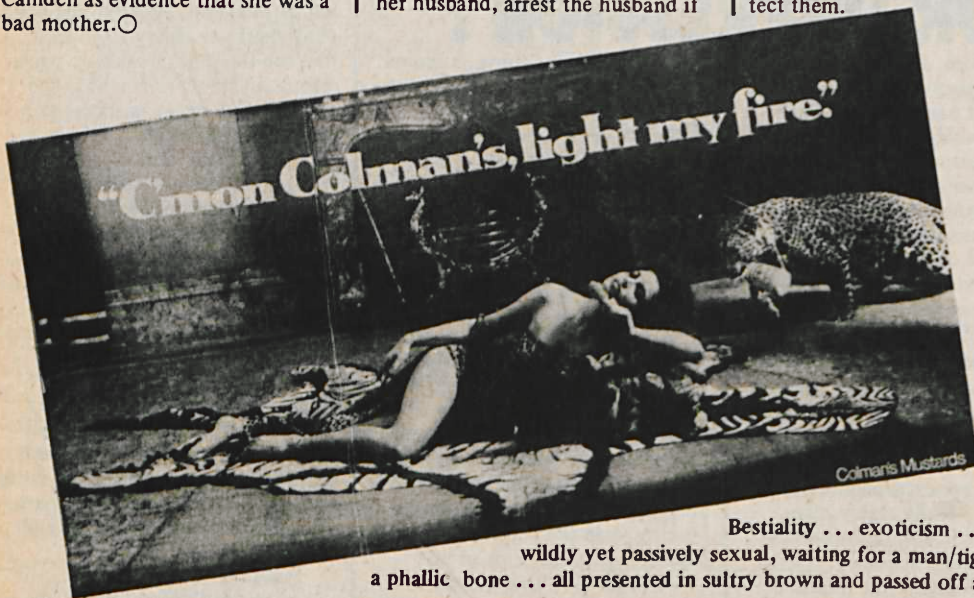
Less detail

The Press Council has upheld a complaint against the *East London Advertiser* for publishing so much detail about a raped woman that she could be identified and for reporting in a salacious way.

"It is accepted by all newspapers that they do not identify victims in cases of this kind," says the Press Council. "Such reports ought to be in very sober and grave terms not calculated to titillate."

The complaint was made by the Rape Counselling and Research Project and Sister Denzil Onslow. They felt the report gave excessive and inaccurate detail, misrepresented the woman's feelings and her efforts to keep calm and avoid further violence and emphasised the sexual rather than the violent nature of the attack.○

Newshorts by Jill Nicholls and Ruth Wallsgrove



Bestiality . . . exoticism . . . woman as wildly yet passively sexual, waiting for a man/tiger, gnawing a phallic bone . . . all presented in sultry brown and passed off as a joke. . .

Meanwhile the Advertising Standards Authority (SR 72) is sufficiently riled by feminist criticism to issue a statement about 'Women in Advertisements'. Apart from laborious attempts to define 'decency' and sneers at "the convinced and sincere advocate of unfettered womanhood who is indignant about any advertisement which doesn't conform to the tenets of women's lib", its main point is that advertising merely reflects what is; it neither constructs nor even influences social reality. Ads

represent women as housewives because women are housewives full stop. Nothing about how women learn to be housewives. "By nature" pronounces the ASA, "advertising is a selling tool, a source of information. This makes it ill-fitted for use as a lever to shift social attitudes." But what about the cultural information we buy with every box of cornflakes—the images of happy families on the outside, the text about sunshine, love and care.

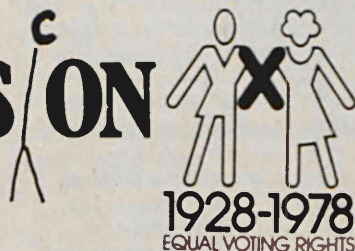
"Unless the advertisement is

seen as relevant, unless the consumer can identify with the woman in the advertisement, she is likely to ignore it," the ASA argues: if women's role changes, advertising will have to change or the woman won't buy the product. . . so they see advertising as realism, not fantasy — trotting along behind society's attitudes, not shaping them. If you couldn't see yourself in the tiger skin, you wouldn't buy the mustard?○



PHOTOS: CAROLINE JOHNS

50 YEARS ON



The official celebrations started on the soggy grass behind the Houses of Parliament. Seventy odd uninvited guests from the Women's Liberation Movement joined the 'official' party which included Shirley Williams who cheered us up with figures on women in higher education (from 1% to 10%—big deal) and asked us to "wait another 50 years".

The ceremony was opened with a few tunes from a group of high-stepping, baton-twirling majorettes (!) and we were then treated to speeches from Len "I'm on your side" Murray amongst others. Germaine Greer took him to task and told how it is for women in the unions especially the catering workers, currently on strike in the Houses of Parliament.

There was heckling from some of us who objected to the closed invitation list and felt that all has not, in fact, been won for us. We were reprimanded by Tory MP Sally Openheim: "The suffragettes were

noted for their dignity and won universal respect". It did sound silly considering that in her audience sat Connie Lewcock (now aged 85) who had once organised the fire bombing of a railway station and that press releases had told us that suffragette Jessie Stephens had decided it was now safe to tell of a well-planned afternoon of action in Glasgow many years ago when downstairs maids and domestics methodically destroyed the contents of nearly every letter box whilst out on what appeared to be a normal afternoon stroll—they had dropped lighted matches or drops of acid through the slots. "Who would have suspected those timid downstairs maids of doing such a thing?"

We asked to be added to the agenda and later our letter of

Shopping scare

CHATHAM, KENT: Joan Olive Ranger, who claims she is frightened of shopping in supermarkets since she was wrongfully arrested at her local Tesco branch, is suing Tesco for the extra cost of having to use more expensive corner shops and claiming damages for indignity suffered.

Meanwhile Frank Pegg, security expert and Home Office lecturer, is calling for legislation to give retailers power to detain suspected shoplifters without formally arresting them—actually giving them more power than the police. "At the moment the retailer or store detective has no option but to arrest shoplifters, and often the thief gets away because the retailer is afraid to do this for fear of the legal consequences of making a mis-

take," says Pegg. His way, retailers could pick on anyone without fear of comeback. ○

Tax fiddle

If a woman writes to the Inland Revenue about tax she's paid, or asking for a rebate, from now on they'll write back—or send the money!—to her instead of her husband. And the wording asking women to give their tax forms to their husbands to fill out is to be changed. Tax allowances are to be given for male housekeepers and men who stay home to look after elderly or infirm parents or younger siblings—acknowledging that it isn't only women's responsibility to look after relatives. So far, OK. But the married man's tax allowance is to remain, instead of paying everyone a higher individual allowance. It's not good enough, Jim! ○

By Emmeline Pankhurst's statue: "The vote is a con—Male power goes on". Insert Lorraine reads a statement from the London Women's Liberation Conference



Front line at the ceremony: Ms MacDonald, Sybil Morrison (Women's Social and Political Union), Muriel Pierotti (Women's Freedom League), Connie Lewcock (WSPU) and Lucy Middleton

support to the suffragettes and feelings about the present day situation was read out. . . "Women are still not free".

The celebrations, both 'official' and 'unofficial', continued that night with a Gala charity performance at the Palladium. Forty women picketed outside while Princess Margaret and Margaret Thatcher watched 85 women perform a show written mostly by men and sing songs like 'I fell pretty', 'There is nothing like a dame', and 'That's why the lady is a tramp (champ)'. With my press ticket (worth £20, some paid £40) I joined the bejewelled guests to find that I had been assigned an escort of six or so security men who followed two or three feet behind me at all times and jumped nervously every time I sneezed or moved quickly—even when I went to the 'powder room' I was followed by women programme sellers sent to check that I hadn't done anything nasty. After one and a half hours of this I left the theatre at the interval to join the protesters who had retired to a

pub opposite and were enjoying their own celebrations—I wished I'd been there all night.

And then on Monday there was an 'official' (again) opening of the exhibition 'A Right To Vote' at Westminster Hall—all was quiet as nobody could possibly have penetrated that security. There were stirring badges, banners and news pictures of the suffragettes fading out into women celebrities of the present. I spoke to 96 year old Jessie Stephens who reminisced about "missiles I have felt—the most peculiar being a handful of dried mackerel"—so much for respect, Sally! She said "You're from Spare Rib? My grand daughter gets it and I read it sometimes. I'm glad you're all carrying on the struggle". ○

Carole Spedding



NEW ZEALAND: Great leap backwards

Abortions have become almost impossible to get in New Zealand since restrictive legislation came into force in April. Both the grounds on which abortion can be performed and the procedure for obtaining one have been amended to obstruct a woman's right to choose.

Under the new Act an abortion can be performed only in pregnancy of under 20 weeks if "the continuance of the pregnancy could result in serious danger (not being danger normally attendant upon childbirth) to the life, or to the physical or mental health, of the woman or girl, and that the danger cannot be averted by any other means".

Incest and subnormality of the mother are deemed to be grounds for abortion, but rape, the age of the mother and foetal abnormality are not. Prime Minister Robert Muldoon has, however, promised to lay on more special facilities for handicapped children and their parents.

To get an abortion, a woman now has to approach her GP who

has to find a gynaecologist willing to do it. The latter has to get permission from two "certifying consultants" but the committee supervising the whole business is having trouble appointing these certifying consultants, currently leaving large areas of the country without any.

So unless a woman with an unwanted pregnancy has £300 to spend on an abortion in Australia, she's stuck. As the Professor of Physiology at Auckland Medical School put it: "It would be illegal for a doctor to induce an abortion in a 55-year-old penniless spinster suffering from heart disease and bearing a mongol foetus resulting from rape."

Eva Kaluzynska

*Last year Muldoon introduced a 10% travel tax on everything spent abroad, including the fare, so he's reaping the benefit of the exodus to Australia. But on the positive side, about a quarter of a million people (out of a population of just over three million) have signed a petition against the Act and many doctors are shocked by its severity and intend to try to get round it.○

HACKNEY COUNCIL in London has overturned its policy of giving the anti-abortion organisation 'Let Live' temporary houses to put up single pregnant women. The council believes it is essential to house

single mothers — and is rushing through its own plans — but feels there should be no moral pressure not to have an abortion applied along with the accommodation. Said Councillor Diana Morley "We know this organisation does not believe in a woman's right to choose, and a Labour Council should have no truck with it." At last, a Labour Council sticking to Labour Party policy on abortion!○

ITALY: Papal power

The Pope has been on the offensive ever since the Italian Senate finally passed a very limited abortion law on May 18. Within a week his vicar-general, Cardinal Ugo Poletti, had declared that all those involved in an abortion (from social worker to doctor) faced automatic excommunication.

Bishop Fiorenzo Angelini warned that nuns in private clinics where abortions were allowed would be withdrawn, and nursing-sisters in state hospitals would be transferred from wards treating abortion cases. In Rome 887 nuns work in 72 private clinics and about 1,000 are assigned to state hospitals which could give free abortions.

But the Pope is not the only problem. Abortion is allowed only

within 90 days of pregnancy if there is *serious and grave risk* that continuing the pregnancy would be dangerous to the physical or mental health of woman or foetus. 'Serious' is not defined and the final decision is the doctor's. If abortion is requested on economic or social grounds, the law requires the doctor to be a 'persuader into motherhood'.



If a woman does qualify, she has to wait a week 'to think it over'; only then can she go to a national health hospital and start queuing — this can take months! Furthermore, abortion must not exceed 25% of the total operations performed in any one hospital.

After the 90 day limit, abortion is allowed only if there is risk of death for the mother or foetus.○ Thanks to Manuela Lombardo

Not in front of the children

Hardly had the rumpus about lesbian AID mothers died down, when two more Who Can Have Babies stories hit the headlines. This time it was teachers, prostitutes and childless women who got hounded. Judges, MPs and newspaper editors were all propounding on mother-love morality, and all the usual myths and prejudices were given a good airing.

All the papers love a Tug Of Love story, and this time they were in luck — they had a prostitute to add some extra zap. This woman had been paid by a childless couple (waiting for a divorce to come through so they could marry) to have a baby using the donated sperm of the man. The unfortunate tangle which transpired when the biological mother decided she wanted to keep the baby was dragged out over several days reportage, with the judge giving grave warnings of what they'd all be in for if they ever dared to tell the little boy of his origins.

While all the adults got a good rapping for their 'pernicious agreement', the prostitute in the end came out of it well — represented as a reformed woman now she had mother-love. It is as if all 'natural' mothers — unless they are

lesbians — are imbued with a moral aura which can obliterate even the most dastardly past life. The overriding belief in the blood-tie love between a mother and her child was used to give this case a kind of natural justice.

So the maternalist prostitute kept her child — meanwhile the headmistress lost nearly everything else. Her job, her professional reputation and presumably her sanity were all wrung out of her as she faced a series of kangaroo courts. Again the theme was 'not in front of the children' — the tenderly innocent population of a large comprehensive school had to be protected, like the little AID boy, from the ghastly truth — that adults have 'illicit' sex and that all sorts of muddles go on behind the facades.

The fact that the headmistress originally misled the school governors and the parents into thinking she was married was hardly surprising. Like a lesbian mother, she'd hardly relish a highly publicised fight to define her own sexuality. While it could have been handled humanely and effectively through extended maternity leave, the press got to work to ensure her humiliation, and the governors joined in with a will. Her teacher colleagues and her union branch have remained typically silent, on the public front at least. "The staff are trying as far as possible not to become involved in the controversy." Thus speaks the teaching profession on the suffering of a colleague. At the PTA meeting they were just

going to discuss the "organisation of a summer fete".

Meanwhile, the father of the baby, himself a teacher, keeps his job.○ Susan Hemmings

READING: Women teachers at Maiden Erlegh comprehensive school have won the right to work in trousers. After an ambiguous ruling by a Berkshire education authority grievances panel, nine women arrived on Monday morning in trouser suits and headmaster James Dunkley refused to let them teach. The next day 13 women wore trousers and the National Union of Teachers threatened strike action if Dunkley made trouble — but he steered clear of school and finally gave in.○

Oily fashion

BP Oil Ltd are feeding schoolgirl fantasies and boosting their own benevolent image by financing a "travel clothes design competition" for schools. "Ten teams of teenagers become West End style fashion models for a day" by competing in the finals in a posh London hotel.

The girls have to design and make up a wardrobe of clothes for an air-hostess flying to Alaska — one uniform and five other outfits with accessories, all the essentials for a one week holiday! The finalists model the clothes on a catwalk — and prizes are presented by 'orrible Oliver Tobias, self-satisfied star of *The Stud*.○

Pepsi pushing

Pepsi Cola has launched a "learn and earn project" in US schools, encouraging children to sell Pepsi at basketball games and other school functions for school credit. Then, each spring, the students write their Pepsi-pushing success stories for a chance at national prizes — share of stock in the Pepsi Cola Company!

Another company finding ways to promote their products and teach consumerism in school is the Savannah Sugar Refining Corporation, which put out a booklet for students stating that "Scientists have found that generous amounts of sugar are a valuable part of a well-balanced diet for growing children".

In a new textbook published by Scott, Foreman and Co children learn to divide 15 by 5 using an illustration of 15 Coca-Cola bottle caps. Education from the folks who feed you. . .

*The US government and the postal service are joining together to tackle the rip-off enterprises which advertise in the back of comic books. A spokesperson said they were doing this because "a kid's first experience with the free enterprise system should be a positive one" — and then it's all downhill after that. . .○ Thanks to 'off our backs'

PLEASE KEEP SENDING US
YOUR NEWS — PHOTOS TOO!

The long search for 'disappeared' relatives

IN CHILE

A hunger strike of 67 women and two men, demanding information about their 'disappeared' relatives, began in Santiago, capital of Chile, on May 22. It has been taken up in 17 other countries, including Britain.

On June 7 the strike was suspended in Chile for 30 days while the Church, as mediator, requested yet again some definite response from the government. But the Chilean dictatorship appears to have finally agreed to allow a United Nations Commission on human rights to enter the country on July 10, so the women may decide to await this visit before resuming their strike.

While attempting to present a less brutal image, the military dictatorship is denying responsibility for more than 2,500 'disappeared' political prisoners. But women are challenging this. For it has overwhelmingly been women relatives who, since 1974, have undertaken the long search for the 'disappeared' prisoners. Travelling from prison to prison through the offices of the authorities and undertaking legal action through the courts, gradually the women began to meet each other and work together.

Today, as an Association of Relatives of Disappeared Prisoners, they meet regularly in groups throughout Santiago and the provinces, with the tacit support of church organisations. They have organised creches, soup kitchens and also workshops where they produce articles to sell for their survival. They have developed contact with other grass roots organisations, but above all they sustain a political protest to the dictatorship.

Out of the empty response to each individual search for a lost relative has grown a stronger collectivity. Through their hunger strike and the publicity they have achieved, they are now confronting the government with its own rhetoric. For the fascist dictatorship needs to idealise the family but will not be answerable when it chooses to break it up. While campaigning as injured members of a family, the women are also acting for themselves. Their own support group is evidence of the need for collective action beyond the limitations of the family structure. ○

Rob Henderson

A group pickets the Chilean Embassy in Devonshire St, London W1 every Tues and Fri, 12-2pm.

& ARGENTINA

"If everyone who watched the World Cup adopted an Argentine prisoner of conscience, not only would it save many lives, but would add to pressures on the Junta to change their policy on human rights," says Martia Zabaleta who refused to stay silent when her husband Alberto was arrested, tortured and held for eight months without charge or trial. Appeals from friends all over the world eventually secured his release and the family's deportation to Glasgow, where Martia has become involved with the Scottish Argentina Campaign.

An estimated 30,000 men,

women and children are either political prisoners or have 'disappeared' after being taken for interrogation by the security forces.

Recently, relatives of missing and imprisoned persons have become very active within Argentina—every Thursday for over a year women whom the Junta calls "the Mad Women of the Plaza de Mayo" have been demonstrating outside the government buildings to pressure the authorities into launching an inquiry. This has led to threats, swoop arrests and even the disappearance of members of the group.

Despite this pressure to remain silent, relatives have given names and information to Amnesty International in the hope that people in other countries will adopt that prisoner and so secure his/her eventual release.

"There is nothing that can be done in Argentina except taking out a writ of habeas corpus (cost £800 with no legal aid available) so this is really the only hope prisoners have of ever getting out of prison alive," says Martia.

Glasgow Women's Liberation group has adopted a woman prisoner—hopefully other women's groups throughout the country will follow suit. Sandi Ritchie-Urquhart
Lists of prisoners for adoption and further information about the campaign from Scottish Argentina Campaign, Jackie O'Brian, 51 Clouston St, Glasgow. ○



Buenos Aires: protesting in the Plaza de Mayo

like it they can leave". What if they'd said "If the blacks don't like it they can leave"?

After heckling, trying to persuade the organisers to take the group off and trying to disconnect their equipment, the protestors gave up—"Most of the other men and women saw us as spoiling the fun. It would have been great if our complaints that night had been heard and people had been curious to discover what were our objections. But it seemed politics are not appropriate for Saturday nights." ○

Idealists in solitary

Four anarchists have been arrested and charged with "conspiracy to cause explosions". Iris Mills and Ronan Bennett were picked up on May 24, the police claiming to have found 'wiring and chemicals' (weedkiller, apparently) in their London flat. Dafydd Ladd was arrested on June 5, Stewart Carr in mid-June. All four were refused bail and remanded in Brixton prison.

Iris Mills is the first woman to be held in this men's prison since the Price sisters (Irish Republicans) in 1975. She is in solitary confinement, on a landing to herself, and is forced to exercise in full view of male prisoners who jeer and make sexist remarks—these appalling conditions are extremely intimidating. Though not yet convicted, she is classed as a Category A prisoner, which is used as justification for

holding her in Brixton, a top security prison.

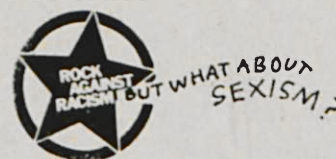
Police heighten the drama by bringing them handcuffed to court and making vague allegations that they are part of a group "not confined to London" of "idealistic persons who would take positive steps to overthrow society". Detective Superintendent Bradbury of the 'Anti-Terrorist Squad' claims that "their activities have been nipped in the bud by their arrests" (hence the lack of concrete evidence and of bombings?). Raids and harassment continue.

Persons Unknown, a quickly-formed support group, is fighting to get bail for those arrested and to abolish all conspiracy laws and the Prevention of Terrorism Act (brought in to extend police powers against Irish Republicans in particular—Iris and Ronan were detained last year under the PTA, but released when nothing could be found against them).

Iris should at least be moved to

Holloway prison for women. Supporters picketed outside Brixton prison on June 30 and urge all women to send letters protesting about her conditions to the prison governor, the Home Secretary and their local MP. ○

Contact Persons Unknown, Box 123, 182 Upper St, London N1.



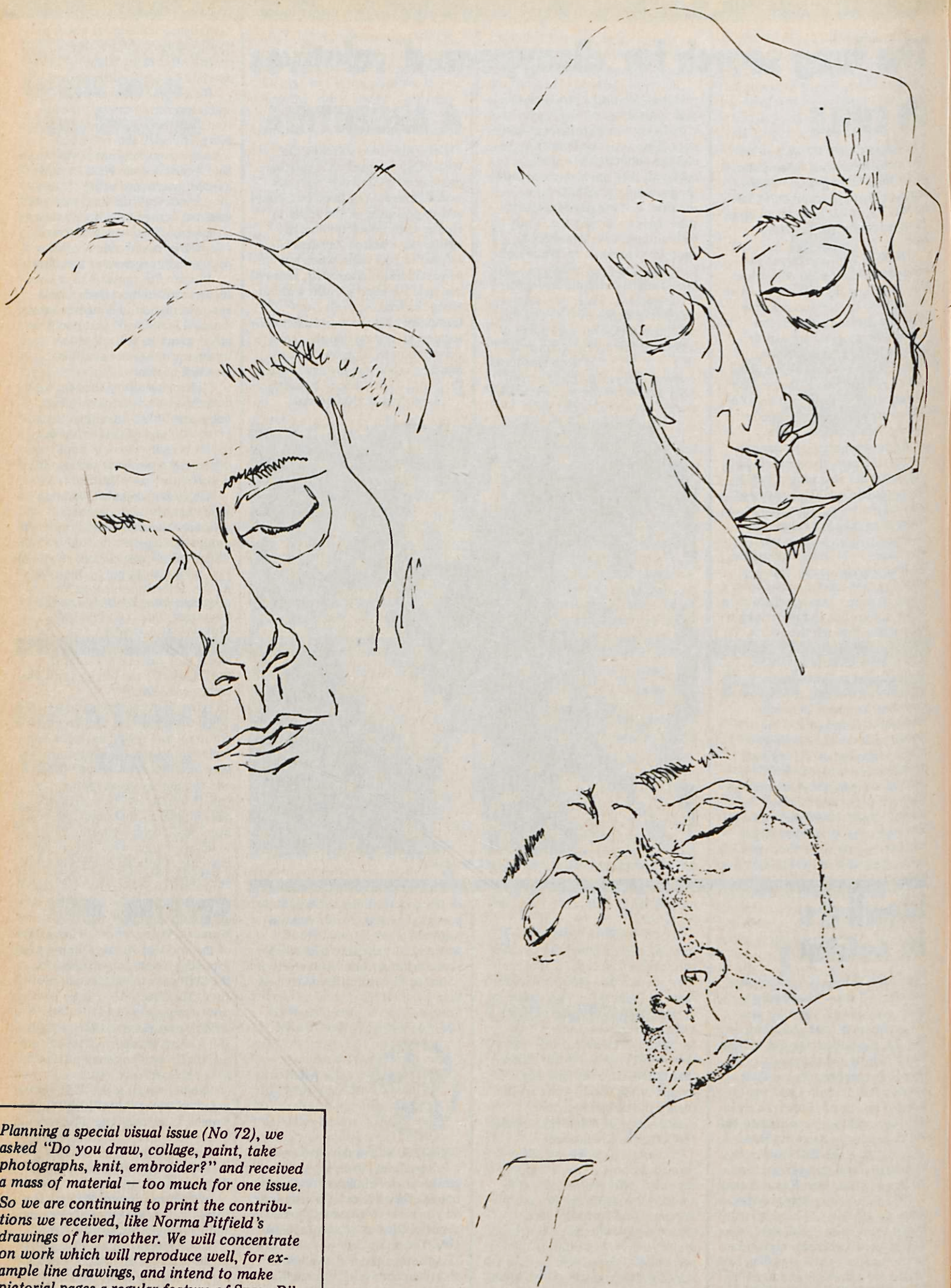
BRIGHTON: Trouble broke out at a Rock Against Racism gig over a group called Fabulous Poodles who opened their set with "a song for all you male chauvinists" (joke?) about picking up convent school-girls. The group followed this up with 'Tit Photographers' Blues' (with singalong chorus of "tits tits tits") and refused to discuss objections, just sneering "you're too narrow, baby" and "if the women don't

SWPING OFF

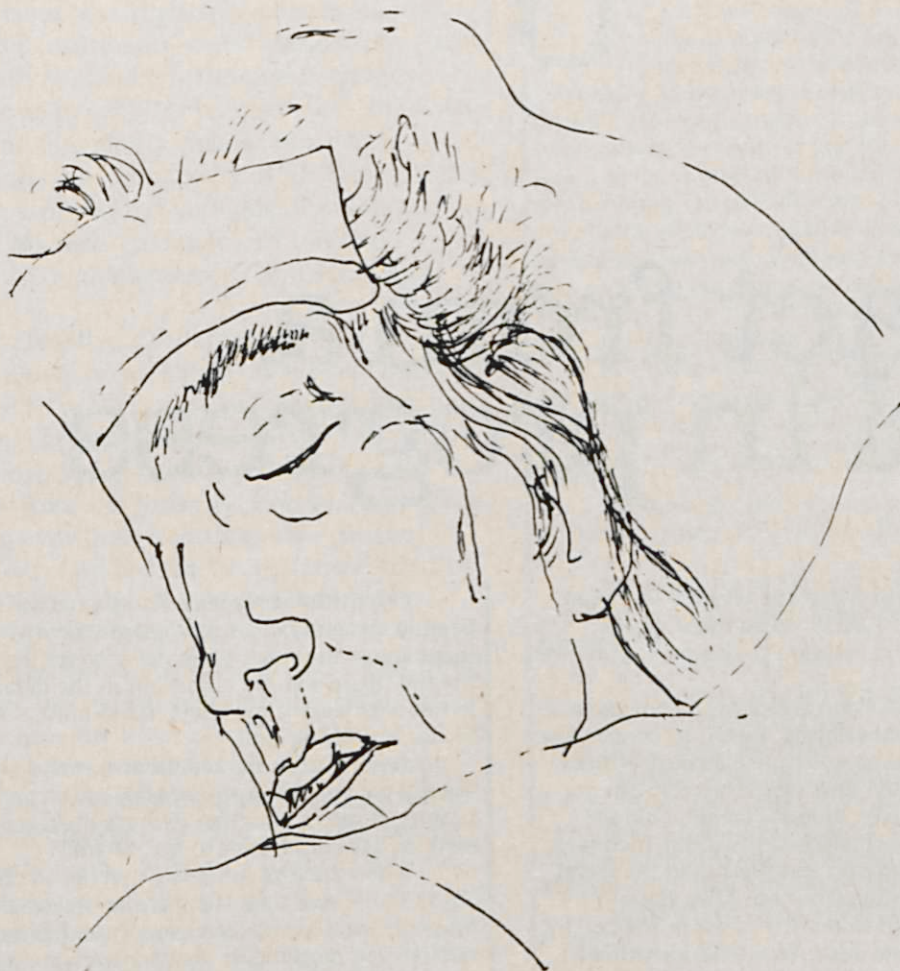
Women's Voice, women's magazine of the Socialist Workers' Party, was formally declared an organisation at the SWP's annual conference in June. The idea is for it to be a 'sister' organisation to the SWP with its own membership, groups and national structure, "capable of making its own decisions at local/national level".

Women members of SWP are expected to see "organising other women" and "building Women's Voice groups" as a political priority—"our leading women comrades should be responsible for it in the districts and branches".

WV groups are urged to get involved in fighting hospital closures and in Women Against the Nazis: "All our experience shows that small meetings, on housing estates, or with a group of interested women are more valuable than large public meetings as a way of building WV groups." ○



Planning a special visual issue (No 72), we asked "Do you draw, collage, paint, take photographs, knit, embroider?" and received a mass of material — too much for one issue. So we are continuing to print the contributions we received, like Norma Pitfield's drawings of her mother. We will concentrate on work which will reproduce well, for example line drawings, and intend to make pictorial pages a regular feature of Spare Rib. Keep sending us your contributions.



My mother died two years ago

These drawings, made as I watched
and waited with her,
are almost too agonising to show.

She was a strong fine woman
whom I loved very passionately.
I want to show the drawings now
because they say something
about death.

That's a subject
we can't care much to look at.

by Norma Pitfield



In Spare Rib 68 we published a section from a novel Eileen Fairweather was writing. We intend to go on extracting from longer works, providing a partial answer to the question "Where are the movement's novels?" (on a typewriter mainly). The following fiction is taken from a book Alison Fell is currently grappling with.

extract from a novel in progress

The information they gave me at the hospital last night was wrong. I arrive at 11.30 to find a space where Andrew's bed should be. He went to theatre five minutes ago, sister says.

The bed gives him small electric shocks. He complained about them last night and, embarrassed, I went to consult the nurses. Of course I was afraid he was having anxiety attacks again and that the nurses at the desk would see through my composed face and think oh yes, anxious parent, anxious child. However they sighed and said yes, it's static, it collects — something to do with the plastic mattresses and the metal frames, shocks are an occupational hazard. They came through to the small ward and tested the frame of the bed by running their scissors along the edge. They said sometimes they earth the static by kicking the bed with their rubber-soled shoes. They looked annoyed at the whole business. One said she touched the wedding ring of an old woman while taking her pulse and the sparks fairly leapt.

Andrew is downstairs somewhere, deep in anaesthesia and I'm up here on the sixth floor with nothing to do but lean on the window-ledge and stare at the sun on Hampstead Heath, at the tracksuited runners and the flyers of kites. I can just see the Magdala Arms, where Jed and I had our last drink together — the Magdala Arms where the last woman to be hanged in Britain was apprehended. It happened in the early fifties. Her name was Ruth Ellis, and hers was a crime of passion, of jealousy. She shot her lover. I didn't shoot Jed. He was already an absence, an escaper who tried to be a presence and failed.

At least I'm here for Andrew, I'm here in the flesh and here in the heart — though at first it was necessary to dress the part, put on a mum costume of neat jacket, skirt, and high boots, to convince myself I could be solid and nurturing enough to reassure the child I've reared for ten years now.

Suddenly he's wheeled in, high up in a bed with cot bars. The nurse shakes him to say mum's here, and I press his hand, whispering it's me, June, before he slumps into infant sleep again; I hope he's seen me and recorded that I am there for him, that he isn't abandoned in that darkness. His face is so young, peaceful. The anaesthetic has taken years off. He sleeps now with arms flung back behind his head, in that vulnerable way he used to years ago, wide open to the light or the dark or the scalpel. His right hand wears a crisscross of lint from an injection.

Last night he sat on a chair by the bed and refused to get back in. He turned his mouth down and went on strike at the shocks. The nurse remade the bed, I cajoled, but he wouldn't move. Visiting hours ended and I had to leave him there waiting for the nurse to wheel his old bed out and a new one in. Still he wasn't happy with it, they told me this morning. He complained of tingling feelings.

Opposite the Magdala Arms a red car slows and parks. Peering and straining, I can just see the man who gets out and lopes across the road: I'm convinced it's Jed. Distance blurs the tall figure and my vision fills in the details — the denim jacket with sleeves too short, the skinny, poking shoulder-blades, the flying hair.

A nurse pulls the blind down with a rattle, blotting out the red car and the green mounds of the park. I want to protest, it seems senseless. Perhaps it's regulations. Let me at least see the sun, I want to say. Sharply.

When she lifts Andrew's coverlet to check for bleeding I look at the scar too. There are several small sutures round his penis and the end looks very naked without its foreskin, swollen and purpling. It may frighten him when he wakes, which will be soon. I need a cigarette but you can't smoke in here and I can't leave the ward now.

after shilly-shallying for months, Heath was forced to call the General Election. Jed's bath was nearly run when Wilson came on the box hoping sincerely that the miners would call off the strike in the nation's interest, and he stripped off a dirty sock and hurled it at him. Even with an eighty per cent majority for all-out action Gormley was wheeling and dealing. Shits, Jed mouthed, shits, the lot of you.

After the bath he posed in front of the oblong mirror. He wore his yellow cotton Y fronts with the white trim. His stomach was shallowly rounded but muscly, pitched taut between two narrow hip bones. He was pleased with what he saw. Not many lumps or inconsistencies or differences in colour like rough goosepimples red, pale putty or the parchment shade of faded tan — he saw an all-of-a-piece brown body, not the gaudy Mantan sort, just a convincing solid bronze. He bent forward, still looking at himself, and slipped his pants down and off, smoothing his waist and stomach with a coquettish gesture, or a solicitous one, he didn't know which, he only knew it was somehow girlish, and that pleased him.

He studied his complexion. It was open-pored and etched with deep smile wrinkles. It was all right, not bad, a bit rough and ready. He passed on to examine his long eyelashes which June said she envied because then she wouldn't need to use mascara. He'd

tried out her mascara all the same and liked it so much he wore it to a couple of parties. He put his tongue out to check its colour. Rolled it around, flexing it. It was muscular, elongated, pushy, like the rest of him. His cock rose slightly at the thought so he stood sideways to the mirror and clasped one hand round this smooth cock which June said reminded her of a horse's one because of its curve and angle. In fact she often said laughingly that he must have an affinity with horses, so many parts of his body resembled them — his nose, his thighs, the delicate arched bones of his feet. He made one milking movement with his hand, squeezing and stretching with it.

The pink wall reflected warmth; his pot plants cast fronded shadows on it. Lying on the bed posed nude like an artist's model, with his head against a blue wall-hanging, he rolled a joint, swivelled his hips to ease his arse into the mattress, and inhaled. He reached out to stroke the ferns. At Christmas bracken fronds had hung over their bed like this — in the country June always raided the hedges and filled the mantelpiece with cascades of elderberries, honey-suckle, or trailing blackberry sprays. Not even winter daunted her, she gathered the flowers and fruits of all seasons. The fern tickled his palm nicely. He began to count; she loves me, she loves me not ... this Christmas June's bouquets had been of red tangled berries — old man's beard, she called it — and of blue pine branches and bleached grasses from the moors. Phil had promised mistletoe from a bush he said was his secret in the oak wood, he stumbled off on several lone searches but Christmas Eve came and went and the mistletoe never appeared she loves me, he ended triumphantly. Stupid, he thought. (And not Phil, his mind added quickly.) cocky, he thought.

In the dimness Andrew has turned on to his side, travelling back from early childhood. Now he sleeps more like his ten year old self. I can see the dark crescent of one lash against his cheek. All around him there's a sprawl of earphones, coiled wires, sickbowl, alarm systems, and a teddy borrowed from the ward playroom.

They say you don't dream under anaesthetic, they say it's a time which eludes memory or which memory simply refuses. A time others must fill in for you, like the murk of infancy. Such questions Andrew asks, trying to fill in these gaps. What was I like, mummy, when I balanced on daddy's hand? What happened when you dropped my cot downstairs? Did I yell, did I fall on my head? What happened when I was born out of you feet first?

His face is reddening. From time to time he stirs. His head will be filling up with football scores and Monster Fun Annuals. When the nurse shakes him to change the plastic sheet he jerks his head up and claps his hands wildly, shouting Very well done! and totters confusedly back into sleep again.

At seventeen I lost twelve hours to blackness. Half a bottle of whisky blotted them out on a heathery shore some miles south of Marisaig. The last thing I remember is the sight of the moon rising over the Paps of Jura. I regained myself in a house with Rona and Jim. They'd driven me home, undressed me and put me to bed. They discovered I had no knickers on. At this point a friend of Jim's, Billy Carmichael the mechanic, pulled my knickers from his pocket like you would a handkerchief. He was shamed almost to tears when he saw the way Rona and Jim looked at him. The bastard. He'd forgotten to replace my underwear when he pulled my jeans up after the undefended rape. I was raped and never knew it. All this is hearsay. There was little trace, hardly a soreness, just a slight stiffness round the labia. Perhaps unconsciousness made me

deeply relaxed or perhaps he moistened me with spittle — whatever the truth, he did no physical harm when he penetrated that rag doll on the sand.

Out there were many Marisaigs. Lounged beside Rona on the Campbeltown bus, bowling along the highland roads to Kintyre where seals flopped and blue jellyfish pulsed on the rocks, I took out a hand-mirror and examined my hair. I'd Headlighted it in the spring, so that as the sun grew stronger and the heads of fair girls bleached naturally to blonde, so would mine, as gradually and almost as naturally. Ironing and wet-brushing had sleeked it and every day it hung longer around my shoulders. I coiled a wave round my finger. A perfect pair we were, Rona and me. Rona with her nut-brown skin and June the new honey-blonde with green-flecked eyes; in Glasgow at the bus station we ate lunch in Lyons and oh, a great many heads turned.

Rona wore pale blue, well-pressed, with a stiff petticoat. The straps of her dress crossed sweet hollows made by her collarbones; blue against shades of dun and brown.

"A fortnight without a letter from Magnus" she complained.

"A fortnight away from parents, though" I reminded. "Freedom. And we'll have the whole house to ourselves, think on that."

"Has this Jim Gaunt got any decent records then?"

Rona asked, challenging. She'd packed Elvis's Golden Discs in her suitcase.

"Och, he's bound to."

"Tell's what he looks like again."

"You're having me on."

Rona shook her head.

I looked at her, still doubtful. "Well he's a real eye-ful. As I said. He's as like Cliff Richard as anything. He wears tight jeans. Baseball boots mostly." Rona was smoking, not paying much attention, fingering an airmail letter from Magnus. "But he's a bit bow-legged really" I added.

"Bow-legged men are sexier, to my mind" said Rona, cheering.

Jim opened the door and stood there with his weight on one leg. A Players hung off his lip. *Night emissions*. The phrase jumped into my head and for a minute I thought I'd said it out loud instead of hello. It connected to a memory from years back, with Mrs. Gaunt changing Jim's sheets in the night and my ear cocked, listening hard through the thin bedroom wall.

Jim's feet were bare. His chin wore a new dark bristle my fingers itched to test. My stomach danced a reel.

"Aye. You're here, then. Hello." He mumbled it, leaving the cigarette where it was. Even Rona looked impressed. Two years of Argyll sun and wind had dried away his pimples. His hips had thinned down and his hair was a wilderness.

"Sorry I didn't get to meet the bus. I didn't finish work till a minute ago."

I introduced Rona and he smiled and took her bag. "Come in and I'll get you some tea. You'll be hungry." No, I wouldn't. "Mum left the house packed with food for you."

When I squeezed past him in the narrow hall I reddened up, remembering more; years ago, squashing past him on the stairway, *Things you meet on stairs*, I'd said rudely, trying to cover crawling embarrassment, and he'd glared.

We had cokes while he wandered about swigging at a bottle of cold beer and making us a fry-up. Rona watched his every move and smoked Embassies with hardly a ten minute gap between them.

"What're you working at?" she asked.

"Labouring. On the roadworks." He rattled the frying pan so that the sausages crackled and spat hot fat at his bare arm. He swore. "Just to fill in time before I go to the Uni. It keeps you fit, though."

Jim wore a white vest. His shoulders were stocky, bunched. I imagined his muscles moving with the older men's as they shovelled grit together and poured asphalt out on the hillroads where the heat shimmered. He had the rawness of a fresh sunburn over the tan. Sweat was ►

gathering where his hair swept to a point at the back of his neck; he smelled as rank as the school gym after the boys had left it. I sniffed in deep.

"What do you do, Rona?"

I work in an estate agent's. I'm a clerk. It's deadboring" said Rona casually, tapping ash.

"You've a sister Pat, is that right? I used to be in the same class as her at Thornbrae." He set out the teacups and the saucebottles on the kitchen table, and started to serve the food.

"Aye. Pat just got engaged."

"She was quick off the mark, then."

"They all are down our way" I said quickly, wondering when would ask what I was going to do, so that I could answer as coolly — though without a cigarette wave in the air — *At the moment I'm trying to decide between English literature and Art.*

"You're going to Glasgow, aren't you?" I asked.

"Yeah. To do languages."

"I expect I'll go to Edinburgh." I was finding it hard to get the sausage and egg down. My jaws wouldn't work at chewing properly, and my mouth seemed to hang in the air yards above my plate, a very long distance to carry the food safely on my fork. These days when my parents ate noisily I'd clench my knuckles white to hold back an outburst and find myself grasping my knife like a dagger.

Peeking at Jim's head bent over his plate I noticed that his hair was full of granite dust, choked to the roots with it. I held my hand flat on the table, for my fingers wanted to creep down into his hair and I feel the grit move against his scalp. My teeth tingled and I gave up trying to eat. Rona's farmgirl appetite seemed to have failed her, too.

Staring at the fern through the coils of dope smoke, Jed considered a memory of Centrepont. He saw himself kicking in the headlights of the police bus — Smash, his boot aimed hard and precise and splinters floated outwards, slow-spreading (no, there were no splinters, the glass was headlight stuff, reinforced, it cracked and caved inward, crystallising.) His head was poised and alert, he was all eyes, scanning like a faun; when the police cordon started pushing a wedge back through the crowd he got in just one over-risky kick before beating it swift and free up Oxford Street. Near him a cop caught a youth by the hair. Jed judged the distance from the other police and kicked him up the arse, grabbed the young guy by the wrist and ran with him.

He threw back his head and laughed out loud, snorted with pleasure, nestling there in his body and feeling it compact and strong. His cock twitched under his hand, grew. Towered. This taut cock of his. Which quivered for a touch. For the unpredictable clench and slew of a cunt, or the controlled grasp of his own hand. Or the tentative learning touch of another's. June's hands were delicate, graceful like birds — she laughed when he told her — and very gentle. She wanted to be tall but she (and now he was comparing her with Wendy) was all small and slender, so fragile that the first night he feared he'd break her. Normally he was more attracted to big women, like Vi and Wendy, ample, cushiony women. Wendy and he, he and June, June and Phil; no, he wasn't jealous, a bit tense maybe, picking up a certain edginess from Phil when they were street-selling the paper together, but no, he knew June was for him and he for her. It was central, she kept assuring him of that.

Jed began to stroke faster, building the speed

confidently, battering away till he came.

He dozed and dreamed he was standing with his brothers in a Bible Tent, with his little boy's face cuddled into his mother's thigh. Everyone was singing Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so, and in the row behind June was singing too, all the time rubbing a photograph of him against her crotch.

On Friday night we bussed it two miles to Fiarloch, to the dance for summer visitors.

"Here, he wasnae bad" Rona whispers to me when I come off the dance-floor.

"He's off a sailing boat. English. He thinks I'm a typical Scots girl." His words conjuring up a broad red-haired girl in tartan and highland dancing pumps. Whereas my hair was lightly backcombed and swept up in a French pleat and I was wearing my narrow striped dress; I couldn't imagine how he'd come to that conclusion. My accent wasn't that broad. I couldn't decide whether to be flattered or not.

"He wants me to meet him at the ceilidh tomorrow."

"You going to?"

"I suppose so."

Walking back along the lochside at midnight, Jim strides slightly ahead with his hands in the pockets of a black blazer. I hope he's noticed how deftly I swung from quickstep into jive when the band changed tempo. Rona and I go arm in arm, our perfume mingles. Jim crosses the road to the beach and makes his way in between rocks, oilcans and dank seaweed wreaths on the pale sand. He's withdrawn and sulky, making no attempt at friendliness now. I want to join him but can't face taking my spike heels and stockings off. Rona and I clatter on along the tarmac.

"Is that the Sputnik?" I point, and all at once the sky brightens and pours shooting stars, shower after shower, from the north, eastwards, southwards, illuminating the loch. We clutch hands tightly, it's like the last day of the world, it's magic. Auspicious.

"Make a wish, make a hundred wishes."

I wish that Jim will fall in love with me. All the way back the commotion in the sky continues.

the moon stood still, on Blueberry Hill, on Blueberry Hill, where I found you. Jim spends Saturday morning playing records and drinking beer. I discover he has a girlfriend called Peggy who works in the bakery. Shopping, I peer in past the window racks of oatcakes and sodascones and see a scrawny girl with her hair in a bad bouffant. When Peggy turns to fetch a tray of loaves her hair at the back where the mirror hasn't checked is scraggy and lacquer-caked. Her breasts are cones under an open-mesh sweater.

"But it's not serious" Jim says, looking at me meaningfully. "Peggy and me — we haven't much in common, after all."

Halfway through the afternoon Rona goes upstairs to write to Magnus and I stay with Jim, sprawling on the sofa while he lies among a litter of newspapers and 45s on the carpet by the radiogram. We brush arms from time to time as we handle the records, as we clean them or take them from their covers or turn them over to study the flip side. I spend some minutes staring at an Everly Brothers sleeve without reading it, too absorbed in the vibrations happening along the hairs of my forearm. The hairs feel as greedy as the sundew, fly-trap, sea anemone.

There is an understanding being strung between us through the racked lyrics and the cigarette smoke and the few words we exchange about Thornbrae, about Marisaig, about the hypocrisy of the Kirk and how freedom lies in the cities. He already knows a set in Glasgow, some of his drinking mates are at the Tech. His digs are arranged. He has no nightmares about leaving home, so I don't confess my own apprehensions.

We drink whisky from the bottle on the sideboard and after a while Rona joins us. She plays *Stand By Me* over and over again. I decide not to meet the Englishman, but Jim says

he has promised to go for a walk with Peggy so I might as well go and hear the music. "I'll wait up for you when you get back" he promises, and smiles. Two of his teeth have gold caps. Peggy and the Englishman mean nothing, after all.

"I'll stay in." Rona sounds resigned, sitting on the edge of the bath while I soak. "My curse has come on and my stomach's hurting like hell."

Up here the hospital towers too high to hear street sounds. Inside the technology of healing is silent and the nurses are scurrying softly, keeping watch at regular intervals over temperatures, drips and pulses.

I sneak the blind aside and look out in time to see the red car make a three point turn on the road. Does Jed even know Andrew is in hospital, does he know I'm up here, one of London's nurturers at one of London's windows? No. The car is a new model, too long in the chassis to be Jed's. No. He is manifestly not here to share the anxieties and comedies of these hours of caring and soothing, of inventing games and distractions.

Time for Andrew's pulse to be taken again. I comment on how hot he looks, so the nurse slides a thermometer under his arm. I've heard that nurses are instructed never to express personal problems, no matter how grave or pressing, to patients. Watching her fingers flutter lightly over him, I want her to lift my wrist and hold it gently and confidently between her finger and thumb, feeling for my rhythms. I want her to brush my hair. I want a white muslin gown and blankets to snuggle in.

But he wakes up. Sees me and smiles wanly. I put my hand out and he slips his into it, groping for my fingers. "I thought you were crying" he mumbles. No, I shake my head, no, I was watching you, and dreaming.

He jerks upright, remembering, and throws the sheets aside to inspect his cock. Then he falls back and tears well up in his eyes. And then the needs and queries come tumbling. Did they put stitches in? Will I have to come back to have them out? Or will they dissolve? When can I have a drink? Will it hurt to piss? The nurses volunteer nothing, so I must go trotting to the desk each time, and even whispered questions ring out in this quiet. They are leaving all the calming to me; they are letting me judge and mediate his needs in the belief that I have a mother's expertise.

Dear mother, there are a few questions I would like to ask

"It's smashing" the Englishman says when the floor is cleared and the chairs and sandwich trays are carried out in the middle of the dancing. "It's quaint". Since he can afford it I let him buy me vodka-and-limes one after another, and show him how to dance Strip the Willow. Everything pleases him. I even roll my Rs to make him laugh; indulging him is easy since the interlude matters about as much as a puffball kicked at on a summer walk. For at home my dark-eyed twin waits, smiling like destiny.

I escape before the ceilidh is over, with a peck on the Englishman's cheek — no need for promises since he's sailing the 'Michaela' across the Sound to Jura at daybreak.

The living room is dark and empty and stale with smoke. Jim is still out with Peggy, then. Upstairs Rona's bed is unmade, strewn with magazines. True Confessions, and a few copies of Playboy. A strip of light ekes under the door of the main bedroom, Jim's Parents' room, and I can hear low noises like a radio playing or someone whispering.

I go into the bathroom and stand at the mirror. I comb out my hair and smooth it with the palm of my hand; I separate the strands of my fringe very carefully. Why is Rona in that room?

When I push the bedroom door it opens slightly then stops. The rumpled frills of Rona's petticoat show on the floor in the gap, jamming it. As I squeeze into the room and step over the petticoat I see the bloodstains spotted over the taffeta and net; it lies there in a frothy soiled heap, like a declaration.

Jim and Rona sit up in the big master bed and blink at me. They've got to be larking about, I think wildly, Rona's

too young, and Jim made me a promise. He promised me. "Hello". Trying not to slur my words. "What're you doing?"

Rona looks sidelong at Jim. He folds his arms behind his head and lets out a long plume of cigarette smoke at the ceiling.

"I'll get in too." Still disbelieving.

Rona gapes. "You can't". The candlewick bedspread slips off her shoulders and she's naked, the beautiful breasts damp and slippery. Jim and Rona are telling me with their looks and their silences that I have neither the power nor the right to squeeze in with them, to cuddle and play with them. Jim wears a singlet like my father. Did he not give me his promise, then? If not, why did I come brazen and whistling along the loch, sauntering back to claim my right to the feel of his hands in my hair and the admiration in his glance? I search his face for a sign but the eyes won't hold mine now.

"Don't you get it?" Rona says. "You just can't." She giggles.

So they've done it. Somehow they've catapulted into that intimacy of discarded clothes and bloodied pants, secret as douche bags or the shared pot under my parents' bed; maybe Jim's promise was nothing more than my own longings clanging too loud in my ears. For here they are, Jim and Rona, one step ahead of me, bonded deeply and mysteriously now.

And I am left out, laughable with my imaginings and presumptions. I back out of the room.

Yes, I tell Andrew, you can have orange juice now, the nurse is bringing it.

Each morning I grope in myself for the chain, some memory chain of mothers and daughters which might transmit the power and knowledge of nurture; I find nothing but broken links. In the darkness something's gone missing. So each morning tearful with longing for Jed and riddled with galactic black holes I piece together a self which will mother and mother and mother.

This morning I washed and dressed and put on waterproof mascara, thinking what if ... what if the sobs and anger make me gag, what if this time my knees give under me on the way to the train, what if Andrew comes out of the anaesthetic and I'm not there? What if he leans on me and I cave in like a cardboard doll's house?

No, I tell him, the nurse says you can't have any food yet, it'll make you sick. I half-sit, half-lie on the bed and put my arm round his shoulders to cheer him; we pore over the Guinness Book of Records together, giggling at the tallest man in recorded history who died aged twenty-two at a height of eight feet eleven inches.

Andrew complains of hunger again. I fetch the nurse. Well, perhaps he could try a cup of tea and a dry biscuit, she decides. My pestering worked.

He smiles as he tackles his tea and says yes, he feels less dopy now. Normality is returning. Crumbs roll off his plump lips and scatter on the bed. I can't stand the din he makes when he eats; he chews open-mouthed; squelch, crunch, mash, the racket goes and little dribbles run out of the corner of his mouth.

The trolley lady approaches to ask if Andrew will be having lunch. She's Asian, Malayan, I think. Yes, tee, thank-you, I want to say, and two sugars please; my stomach rumbles menacingly. Andrew munches on deafeningly with his good strong jaws and I have to clamp my teeth together to suppress an eruption of scolding; my throat tightens against a kind of growl and my saliva begins to run. The lunch lady repeats her question politely. Pointing to the 'Nil by Mouth' sign above Andrew's bed I tell her that I don't think he's allowed anything else, and she nods, making a sympathetic face at him, and pads away out of the ward. Offering me nothing. — Hey, I want to yell, don't mothers get fed?

Andrew licked the last crumbs from his plate and settles back on his pillows. Like a little Mogul, I note irritably. After a couple of minutes he sighs and frets a bit about sickly feelings in his stomach.

But he keeps the food down. A good sign. ●

READERS' MEETING



Our last readers' meeting was lively, but the smallest we've ever had, though sales are going up a little so it can't be for lack of readers!!

We thought it might be because the advert was hard to read and because the meeting was on a Wednesday evening, a bad time for women with children or women coming from outside London. So we're holding our next meeting on a Saturday afternoon — July 29th at 2.30. If you can't leave the children, bring them, and one of us will take them to the park or something. Do try to come and tell us what you think of the magazine.

PS. We are planning to have reader's meetings outside London in future when we have done a 'regional' page on a particular area. Watch for details.

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more letters...

* Radical weapon

Dear *Spare Rib*,
Sheila Jeffrey's article must have hit pretty hard judging from the response in *Spare Rib* 71. Frankly, I'm surprised, I didn't agree with the whole of her article either but rather than serious discussion of the issues raised I read what amounted in total to heavy personal attack, why?

There was complete silence over the most important issue she raised; as she put it very accurately "The technique of consciousness-raising is the basis of the revolutionary struggle of women". I sense a tendency to dismiss it, to say oh, we've been through that, we've done consciousness-raising, now we can get on to action. We haven't, it is important and the vehemence of the letters shows how serious the debate around therapy, psycho-analysis and consciousness-raising is. In four letters defending therapy consciousness-raising hardly gets a serious look in — it was once a radical weapon. What happened? In sisterhood, Claire MacDonald, Bingley, Yorkshire.

* Obscure

Dear *Spare Rib*,
Although this is the second time I have renewed my subscription I still consider myself to be one of the women on the fringes of the Movement. I do not belong to a political party, a women's group or even a proper trade union — since I got a new job in this area. Is the idea of jazzing up the borders and

colours of the printing an attempt to attract a wider circle of women? If so, I find it does not help me very much as it makes the print rather obscure when trying to read on a crowded train — which seems to be the only time I have spare for reading now.

I particularly like articles of a personal nature concerning women who have had particular struggles over jobs, relationships etc. I have found the recent articles on conferences frankly boring. Does every one who reads the magazine go to all the conferences? If not, it is dull reading as the reports seem to say one thing — nothing got decided, splits were made, women ended up fighting and leaving feeling depressed. It hasn't exactly made me feel that a women's conference would be a constructive experience — on the contrary it would be the last place I would choose to spend a week-end now.

Sometimes I have found the articles written by women outside the collective too... intellectual...? There are often words I cannot understand and the writers are quite obviously often graduates — my education goes up to OND standard on a formal basis, but luckily my graduate boyfriend can interpret what these intellectual writers have to say.

Love,
Janet Bacon,
Kenley, Surrey.

* Not so insular

Dear *Spare Rib*,
Here is my subscription for another year, hope it will help you (and

me!)

I was in Britain in 1976 as a French assistant in Newport and got the impression that the whole country was definitely and forever stuck in the mud of TV games programmes and Tesco special offers. Then I discovered your paper and could see that there are a few good commotions rising here and there across the island. Comforting thought! I am with you with all my heart and mind. We still have a long way to go, everywhere in the world... One victory over the male system is nothing more than a nibble.

Love in ♀,
Anne Jeantoux,
Grenoble, France.

* Is pro-women...

Dear *Spare Rib*,
Although I had some experience of the women's movement before *Spare Rib*, actual monthly contact with women's views presented in articulate and well-informed articles not only enlarged the ideas I was beginning to form but also — and perhaps most important of all — made me realise and enjoy my femininity. One of the most valuable achievements of your magazine is the positive celebration of sisterhood and the joy of womanhood, despite the manifold struggles our society presents us with.

I've been glad to see that editorial (or rather collective!) policy hasn't changed over the years, and the same wide range of issues are covered. Keep it up!
Love,
Sarah Spiller,
Farnham.

*... Anti-men?

Dear *Spare Rib*,
I have stopped getting *Spare Rib* since I find the magazine boring, dogmatic and anti-men. I'm sorry the magazine has deteriorated. Look to the past and perhaps you will see how it has changed for the worst!
Much love though,
Linda,
London SW19.

Mechanical aim

Dear *Spare Rib*,
I am a 17 year old girl and I am determined to be a mechanic. I left school in order to do this last year, but I am now in a clerical job because I was unable to find anyone willing to take on female apprentices. I would be very grateful if anyone could help me achieve this aim. The alternative is to wait until I am 18 so that I can take a government training course.
Best wishes,
J. Knopp,
11 Cottesbrook St,
London SE14.

* Left is rights

Dear *Spare Rib*,
I was disturbed/upset by Sallie Eden's claim to have "blue blood" (*SR* 70). Why the demand to "cater

for us too"? — I never thought that the Women's Liberation Movement was a service for other women who sat back and waited. And I don't believe that full liberation is possible except in a 'red' society. I'm not advocating quiescence until the revolution comes — but *real* liberation in a capitalist system? For a start, I want the chance to earn a living in a job which gives me satisfaction — and I want everything that I feel I'd like to be the right of everyone, not just available for those who have somehow managed to climb the class tree of our society, get themselves a top job and put their children in one of the few nurseries. To put it simply, being blue can only offer a minority of women the possibility of a decent position in our society.

Yours,
Eithne Hannigan,
Cambridge.

Harlan County

Dear sisters,
When I first read Kerry Schott's review of *Harlan County USA* (*SR* 72) I thought the ending in particular was patronising. I've now seen the film and I don't agree that those involved in the strike saw it only as a matter of getting their "constitutional rights" recognised or that they saw no links with US capitalism as a whole. Certainly the women involved — mainly miners' wives — weren't consciously feminist but I felt they played more than a self-sacrificing support role — their lives and livelihood were affected too.

I feel Kerry should have made clear that she was writing not just on the film but from her own experience of the strike and American trade union politics, and that the film was produced by a mainly-woman crew who lived in Harlan for over a year while filming. Their commitment doesn't automatically make it a good film, but it is worth a mention. I hope the review won't put people off seeing it.
Love,
Jill Nicholls.

* Another view of the plenary

Dear *Spare Rib*,
In the aftermath of the National Conference, we felt too upset to write down our view of what actually happened. But we feel the report in *SR* 70, and letters in 71 are onesided and inaccurate.

At the beginning of the plenary, some revolutionary feminists suggested we should think about abolishing demands and plenaries. They really wanted to open up discussion about the purpose and nature of the demands, not to disband the plenary then and there. The revolutionary feminists stayed at the plenary and consistently supported the practical proposals put forward by Brighton Women's Liberation group (BWL).

BWL agreed to put a series of proposals to the national conference concerning the sixth demand.

and bringing out the feminist principles behind all the demands. In keeping with the spirit of these proposals, when the 7th demand discussions happened at the plenary, some of us proposed substituting the Bristol demand with the addition of the magic sentence "All male violence against women is an expression of male supremacy and political control of women", instead of the demand on the agenda sheet.

A vote was taken to choose between these two versions of the 7th demand with the understanding that if the agenda demand was passed, we would take several small word amendments which had already been suggested. The vote went 461-242 for the Bristol demand including the extra sentence. Then to our (shock) horror somebody suggested an amendment to the new 7th demand which deleted the magic sentence.

Then all hell let loose! There seemed to be many different reasons why women voted to delete this sentence.

- 1) Socialist feminists maintained that rape is a class issue, and not basically an expression of male supremacy. They did not explain how rape is a class issue, and still have not done so.
- 2) The demand was too long with the added sentence.
- 3) The Bristol demand as it originally stood implicitly included the idea that rape is an expression of male supremacy.
- 4) Some women dislike revolutionary feminists and vote against any demand which they support.
- 5) Fear of making feminist principles explicit in case we alienate 'ordinary' women and/or men.
- 6) Fear of recognising to what extent men occupy power positions over women, and therefore seeing that men, not the system, are the enemy.

We voted to carry on with the agenda. The sixth demand was to come up next and was very relevant to the whole discussion about feminist principles. However, some women wanted to take solidarity proposals next since there was only one hour left and it was agreed that each of these would have five minutes.

Then a black woman stood up and said that if black women were not allowed to speak next they would never come back to another conference. Women agreed to let this happen although it had been pointed out at the 1977 conference that cheering every time a black woman speaks is patronising and racist.

At this point dirty tricks started; we were accused of being racist, classist, fascist, oppressive etc. The discussion around the sixth demand and feminist principles was delayed by default as the issues of race, class and imperialism were considered to be more important and time was short. We also consider that it was a tactic to make the radical/revolutionary feminists appear hysterical/oppressive/unreasonable/unwisely freak minor-

ity compared with cool, calm, rational socialist feminists (see *Socialist Challenge*, for example). The dirtiest trick of all, and the most subtle, going on throughout the plenary and since, was to accuse revolutionary feminists of being male because of showing their anger, whilst others were being calm and rational. What is a plenary but a patriarchal structure, a father? and what is so *un-male* about that, and *male* about frustration and anger? It is as if socialist feminists are saying that we couldn't behave ourselves, and therefore we should have a structure to contain and control us (see the letter in *SR 71* and *Socialist Challenge*).

It was then one minute to four and the plenary was due to end at 4 p.m. Many women wanted to shelve the sixth demand proposals until next year, including one aligned socialist woman (International Marxist Group) who claimed she had written it. The BWL group who had proposed it wanted to go on because we felt it had been shelved for years. Also if we accepted the first feminist principle, discussion of other principles would be almost inevitable in the coming year.

While the plenary was disastrous and upsetting it revealed genuine political differences within the movement which we have been afraid of facing up to. The plenary has stimulated intense discussions in Brighton and elsewhere.

Our politics are feminist. We analyse our oppression as due to male supremacy, to the patriarchy. Men are our oppressors, the enemy, and not some abstract "system". The system is created and perpetuated by men for the benefit of all men. Capitalism, class, racism, fascism, colonialism and imperialism are all *male* institutions, current manifestations of male rule — the patriarchy (not to mention the family, architecture, language, technology etc.)

Many women are afraid of making our feminist politics explicit in case we alienate 'ordinary women'. This is essentially a patronising attitude, believing women are too stupid, blind, or frightened to recognise the truth. The autonomous women's movement can reach out to most women by "talk and action which goes to the heart of women's problems. The truth is new and the truth is powerful" (Redstockings: Feminist Revolution).

Joan Mortimer, Annie Rotheram, and other members of Brighton Women's Liberation.

Correction

Talking about the Home Confinement Society in *Reproduction Rights* (SR 71) Anna Briggs meant to say that "We can join the Home Confinement Society, although it doesn't claim to be feminist, and set up local groups where none exist". She points out that though the society doesn't claim to be feminist, it is doing powerful work to support women in pregnancy and labour.

1908 SUFFRAGE POSTER IN COLOUR £1.20p



First published by The Brighton and Hove Women's Franchise Society in 1908.

Send cash. PO's, cheques to:
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Make out cheques to Spare Ribs Ltd.

NAME

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T.U.L.C.

National Museum of Labour History

The TUC has now, through its Appeal, formally recognised the Labour History Museum as being "The Major Institution for the Preservation of Historical Material Operated by the Labour Movement." Due to the generosity of Tower Hamlets Council the Museum will be moving to enlarged premises in the near future.

WILL YOU HELP PRESERVE THE HISTORY OF THE LABOUR MOVEMENT BY BECOMING AN ASSOCIATE MEMBER OR BY DONATING BOOKS, PAMPHLETS, BADGES, BANNERS, POSTERS, PHOTOGRAPHS, ETC.

Individual membership 50p, OAPs 25p, affiliated membership £2. We also run CSE to A level lectures.

FULL DETAILS etc. FROM National Museum of Labour History, Limehouse Town Hall, Commercial Rd., London, E.14. Tel. 01-515 3229

The museum is open 10.30 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. (Tue-Fri), and 6.30p.m. Wed. The first Sunday in every month from 2-6p.m. HOW TO GET THERE—Mile End/Aldgate Underground. Buses 106, 227, 40a, 23, 15, 5.

Capital: Lilongwe (with some functions at the previous capital, Blantyre; and a few at Zomba.)

Population: 5 million

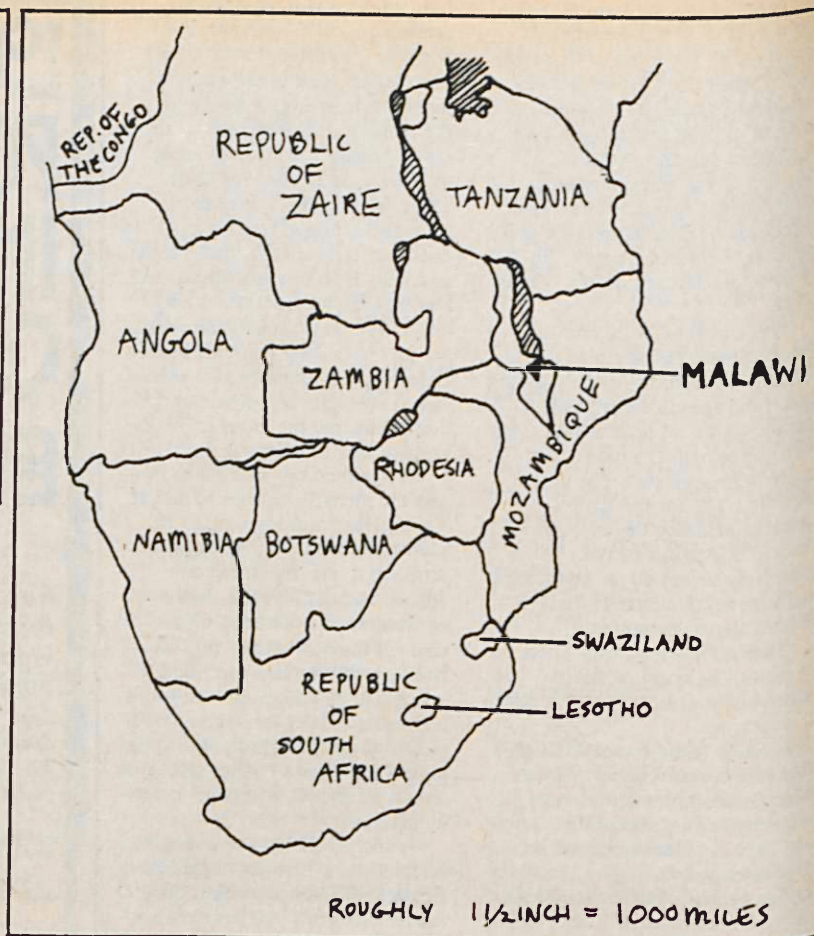
Major export: Agricultural produce

Orientation: Very pro-West and anti-Communist; close links with South Africa, which is building the extravagant new capital.

Economy: Closely controlled by government in co-operation with multi-national corporations and local business interests. Big plantations are encouraged over small-scale producers.

Social issues: Heavy migration of men to the South African gold mines. Women are increasingly responsible for food production.

Losing ground in Malawi



Development planners in Malawi have ignored the role of women. It is not just that agricultural resources and training have been given to the men, although the women do more work on all the crops; but in communities where women have traditionally owned and inherited land, western planning 'experts' assume that property should be in the hands of men.

Barbara Rogers, a researcher in Development Studies, has recently been in Malawi looking at the way development affects women.

The whole question of women's work has until recently been at the very bottom of the development planners' list of priorities. That, they thought, was "social development" — very nice, but a luxury for a developing country trying to pull itself up by its own boot-straps. Once the real thing—economic development—was providing a little extra for that sort of thing, well then by all means . . . In fact, expenditure on the "social development" category has declined steadily ever since the programmes were started.

Malawi and neighbouring countries give the lie to this kind of approach. There can be no real economic development at the village level unless women are fully involved, for the simple reason that they are the food-producers. To exclude them from agricultural training is to make that training largely irrelevant to the area it is intended to serve. Consider the evidence from Malawi:

* In four out of five areas surveyed the women worked the same, or longer hours in the fields than men. In addition, of course,

"In spite of working as long as or longer than the men on the crops, the women are still expected to do a good daily stint of domestic activities and end up with far less

leisure than the men."

"Domestic activities", incidentally, includes house-building as well as manufacture of household articles and beer-brewing, by far the most important commercial activity in the rural areas.

* Because of heavy migration by men to the South African gold mines and modern sector employment in the towns, there are more women than men actually doing agricultural work at any one time. Taking into account their heavier work-load on a per-capita basis, then, the report of the five-area survey comments:

" . . . When we reckon in absolute terms it is clear that the great majority of the crop and field work is in the hands of the women."

* It is often thought that women represent the 'backward' subsistence sector — i.e. food — while men make inroads into the commercial, or cash-crop areas like tobacco, coffee and cotton. Evidence from Malawi shows this to be false. The survey report makes this clear:

" . . . the women of the household do more work than the men on every crop; although the gap is widest in the case of maize, the staple food crop. Moreover the women are not only employed in harvesting or grading. A substantial part (39%) of the tobacco nur-

sery and planting work is done by women. Relatively skilled operations like cotton spraying are undertaken more frequently by the women. . .

"It is surely true therefore that women ought to have more opportunity of learning about all agricultural processes, including modern techniques for the production of cash crops."

Faced with this kind of evidence, one might expect that women would be attending every kind of agricultural training course there is, benefiting from extension advice, credit, as well as themselves being employed to pass on their skills to other women.

In Malawi, there is no tradition of female subservience or seclusion. On the contrary, the women are forceful and interact freely with the men.

Society has been traditionally based on a matrilineal and matrifocal family system. Men went to live with their wives, and received land from their wives' family. Land was passed on by women to their own children, and by men to their sisters' children, for whom they took more responsibility than did the fathers.

Matriliny seems to offer substantial benefits in terms of the continual redistribution of wealth within a community — a prime development objective. A survey of the World Bank-financed Lilongwe Land Development Programme showed that women are significantly more likely than men to favour sharing within the whole extended family. However, it seems that development planners are frightened of the matrilineal system, and certainly hostile.

Anthropologists have argued that

matriliny is an evolutionary forerunner of patriliney (in which property is handed from father to son). The male supremacy of western society – which is assumed to be more ‘civilised’ – is defended in terms of patriliney being the final evolutionary stage of human society. A magnificent circular argument! This, like much of the ‘man and society’ school of anthropology, has much more to do with male insecurities in western society than with any reflection of what they like to label ‘primitive’ communities.

Matriliny is a perfectly rational system of social organisation which is found in a wide variety of communities throughout the world, though many of the African ones have been given particular attention. But they are rapidly being undermined by the introduction of western law and customs which arbitrarily assigns property rights and legal responsibilities to men only. Development policies which allocate benefits to men reinforce this, with the implicit assumption that women should be in some ill-defined ‘domestic’ role (which does not correspond to their traditional responsibilities at all). The case of the Lilongwe Land Development Programme and its impact on the matrilineal Chewa people is a typical one.

LLDP officials base their arguments against matriliny on answers to a survey

question, put to *men* on the scheme, as to whether they wanted ‘their children’ to inherit their land. This is extremely ambiguous since the whole question is which children are regarded as ‘theirs’ – their wives’ or their sisters’. Using this flimsy evidence to argue that matriliny is ‘naturally’ declining, officials are forging ahead with plans for land registration which will give absolute rights over all land owned by a household to the ‘head of the household’. This will almost invariably be a man, except in cases of widows and perhaps women whose husbands are away from the farm for years at a time. The registered land will then automatically pass to the man’s sons, not his sister’s sons – meaning that the new law will trample underfoot all the old customs and obligations. To a large extent this is a conscious and deliberate policy. As one United Nations official commented to me:

“We’ve got to get rid of these old traditional ideas and customs standing in the way of development . . .”

What then is development? All that is western, commercial, male-dominated? If so, what happens to the traditional values of sharing with a poorer neighbour, and what happens to women and the children they have to feed? Women could be the strongest force for development. Instead, they are to be its victims. ■

BACK COPIES ON THERAPY



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SHORTLIST

WRITE TO RUTH WALLSGROVE
27 CLERKENWELL CLOSE
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If you want something to go into Shortlist could you please keep it short, remember to put the full address of the place (and postal district if it's in London), and send it in writing, by August 3 for the next issue – telephone messages half an hour before we go to the printers are no fun!

MEETINGS & CONFERENCES

If you are organising or going to a conference, could you pick up, or write to us for copies of Spare Rib to sell and distribute there?

Feminist History Group
At Women's Research and Resources Centre, 27 Clerkenwell Close, London EC1. 7.30 21 July Felicity Hunt will talk on *Women in the Printing Trades 1800-1850*
4 August. Session on work in progress

Scottish Radical Feminist Camp/Conference
28-30 July. At Kelty, Fife. A camping (bring tent and food) weekend to enable radical feminists to meet and talk. 'Bring your own workshop'. No cooking facilities, and creche will probably not be on premises. There may be another camp in Edinburgh, the same or following weekend. More details in WIRES. Contact Lyser, St Andrews 5197

Women's Research and Resources Centre Seminars
7.30 at WRRC, as above.
28 July. Hilary Simpson on *The Male Author's Use of Women's Writing: The Case of DH Lawrence*.
11 August. Jenny Teichman on *Illegitimacy and the Status of Women*.
25 August. Dale Spender on *Sexism and Language*

Women Against Nuclear Power Conference
28-30 July. At Bradford University. Cost approximately £2; please register in advance. For details contact Sheryl Crown, 25 Northdale Rd, Frizinghall, Bradford 9 (0274 493010)

St Albans Women's Voice Festival
29 July. Day-Faulkner Hall, Victoria St, St Albans. Workshops and discussions (75p). Evening-Pioneer Youth Club, Harpenden Rd, St Albans. Film, *Take it like a Man, Ma'am!*, and Jam Today (£1). Creche provided. Contact Jane 0727 68678

A Woman's Right to Choose
29 July. 11-5, Resources Centre, North Road, Brighton, Day School run by Brighton National Abortion Campaign. Creche and hopefully disco in evening. For more details contact Avril Arthur, 31 Franklin Rd, Brighton (0273 696298).

Knowing Your Rights
12-18 August. Wedgwood Memorial College, Barlaston Village, near Stoke-on-Trent. Summer school on Women's Rights. Organised by Workers' Educational Association North Staffs District. For those living in Staffordshire £26.75, retired £21; from outside, £34. Details from Secretary of College.

Homosexuality Day for Women
13 August. 10-5. Looking at sexual, social and emotional problems. Group for those currently in a homosexual relationship and also those who want to explore themselves in relation to homosexual or bisexual feelings. £7.50. Contact Anne Dickson, 83 Fordwych Road, London NW2 (01-452 9261).

Co-counsellors Camp
19-25 August. For experienced co-counsellors, to explore different aspects of the theme 'Taking control of our lives.' Accommodation will be in tents-bring your own. Cost about £18 including food. Booking is essential as there will be only 30 places. Please send sae for more information to Chris, c/o Crabapple, 16 St Mary's St. Shrewsbury.

Community Implications of Personal Power
19 August-2 September. At University of Nottingham. A person-centred approach workshop. Please send sae for details to Margaret Robertson, 21 Station Rd, Teddington, Middlesex.

Towards a Radical Feminist Theory of Revolution
16-17 September. At Resources Centre, North Rd, Brighton. Second national conference. Advance registration is essential, as space, accommodation and creche are limited. "We want suggestions and papers, on topics and structure." Send sae for registration to 95a St James St, Brighton.

National Conference on Rape
October. In Bristol. Anyone who is interested, or has ideas or suggestions for workshops, please contact Bristol Anti-Rape Group, c/o Bristol Women's Centre, 44 The Grove, Bristol 1.

NAC and the Unions
25 November. At Caxton Hall, Red Lion Sq, London WC1. "For years now the Trade Union movement has been passing resolutions on women's rights-on maternity leave, nurseries, contraception, abortion. How are we going to turn all those brave words into fighting action? National Abortion Campaign and the Labour Abortion Rights Campaign have called a Trade Union delegate conference on abortion to try to do just that. Get your union branch to sponsor it, and make sure they send delegates. Don't let the Unions off the hook!!" Details from NAC, 30 Camden Rd, London NW1 (01-485 4303).

CAMPAIGNS

Women and Social Security
The National Council for Civil Liberties and the Child Poverty Action Group have launched a campaign for equal social security rights for women. They have put out a leaflet pointing out the inequalities at the moment, and about an EEC Directive which would be a step in the right direction-if the British Government accepted and implemented it. The campaign aims to get social security included under the Sex Discrimination Act-yes, it's excluded at the moment! The leaflet can be obtained by sending a sae to NCCL, 186 Kings Cross Rd, London WC1; bulk orders of over 50 cost 1p per leaflet. There's also a pamphlet - *The Unequal Breadwinner*, price 30p (incl. postage) from the NCCL.

Day Care Abortion Campaign
"Day care abortion clinics would be a huge step forward for women-they'd mean early, safe abortions with no need for overnight stays. But there are only 12 outpatient abortion clinics at the moment, some only part-time..." The National Abortion Campaign has compiled a Day Care Kit for £1, and will be producing badges and posters for the campaign. More information about the campaign and materials available from NAC, as above.

Women's Health Centre Campaign
A group of Islington women have started a campaign to get an independent women's health centre in the area-to provide advice for individual women, campaign for

women's health needs to be met in the NHS, and to bring together activities and resources, eg self-help, information. "We need women to join us and to share their experience and expertise, and groups to support the campaign." Contact Clare, 01-272 7979 or write c/o 90c Petherton Road, London N5. (There was a mistake in the telephone number last month-sorry!)

PLAYS AND FILMS

Edinburgh Film Festival
This includes a conference on Feminism and the Cinema, 21-26 August. With seminars, screenings, forums aimed at assessing developments in feminist film making and theory. Information from Department M, Edinburgh International Film Festival, The Filmhouse, 88 Lothian Road, Edinburgh. (031-225 1671)

In the Best Interests of the Children

27 July. 8pm at Women's Arts Alliance, 10 Cambridge Terrace Mews, London NW1. Film about lesbians, their kids and custody. 75p, 50p for unwaged.

FUNK AND MUSIC

Brent Women's Centre Summer Event
22 July for a week. Social events with women's music, exhibitions, discussions, films and theatre groups. If you'd like to exhibit your pictures, organise a workshop, please get in touch. Otherwise come along and make it fun! Brent Women's Centre, 138 Minet Ave, London NW10 (01-9653324) - open Thursdays.

Olivia Records
Olivia Records is an all-women's recording company in California which produces a variety of feminist and lesbian feminist records. They can be obtained from A Woman's Place, 42 Earlham St, London WC2; Women's Arts Alliance (see above); Compendium, 240 Camden High St, London NW1; Grass Roots Books, 1 Newton St, Manchester M1 1HW.

WHIZZ ALONG TO
BRENT WOMEN'S CENTRE

WOMENS
FESTIVAL



22-29 July

ALL WOMEN WELCOME!

ART

Jackie Duckworth
27 July for 3 weeks. At WAA, as above. It's only an illusion, exhibition of photographs.

Laurieston Hall Women's Arts Festival
11-18 August. At Laurieston Hall, Castle Douglas, Kircudbrightshire, Scotland. Four days of films, theatre, dance, music, video, visual and performance arts etc. including Clapperclaw, Pirate Jenny, Roadgang. Then 3 days for workshops, discussions, impromptu events and enjoying ourselves. Women only, except for events during the day over the first four days. Book in advance. For further details write enclosing sae to Laurieston Women's Arts Festival, Laurieston Hall.

will be run by Asian women for Asian women. This will serve as a refuge, information centre, counselling and research centre. "We are negotiating for a building, but we need money for staff and equipment." To receive newsletter *A WAZ* please contact Ms Chowdhury, 'Scope', 46 High St, Southall, Middx. (01-574 1325)

Correction

There is no longer a Women's Centre at 158 Grafton Rd, London NW5, as printed in SR 70

Nelson Women's Group

They are hoping to open a Women's Centre. "We are considering applying for financial aid from the EOC and the Manpower Services Commission. We would like to hear from any women who have received grants for a centre, or who have information and experience they could share with us." Please contact Nelson Women's Group, c/o Fold Cottage, Coldweather Ave, Nelson, Lancs.

combined some funds to order from USA a number of copies of this. It is a short booklet by a feminist theologian examining the theological position supporting a woman's right to control her own fertility. "Regrettably we have to charge 50p (which includes postage) to cover our costs." From RCF, 33 Arlow Rd, London N21

Chartist International No 2

New issue out includes "The Anthropology of Evelyn Reed"—a critical review of *Women's Evolution*. Also "Trotskyism and Sexual Politics", an examination of "the most outstanding gap in the whole of the Lenin-Trotsky tradition". Articles on Socialist Unity and Ireland. Available from Chartist Publications, 60 Loughborough Rd, London SW9. 35p + 15p p&p; 3 issue subscription £1.20.

Peoples' News Service

PNS will mark its 150th issue by substantially extending its coverage, introducing a new format and by being printed professionally. From community newspapers and such, PNS prints news that Fleet St doesn't. (They also welcome any contribution of articles, especially from outside London.) The new PNS will cost 25p—up until September they are offering a special subscription for £2 for 10 issues, after then £2.50 for 10*.

What's in a Name?

This pamphlet sets out the legal position governing the surnames women use, with examples from NCCL's files of ways in which resistance to married women keeping their own name is expressed, and makes practical suggestions for overcoming some of the problems. (It is absolutely legal to keep your own name, in fact!) Available from NCCL, as above, for 35p (incl. p&p).

Fresh Start

A guide to training opportunities from the Equal Opportunities Commission. It's a simple illustrated booklet for "people" returning to work after a period at home looking after children or relatives, explaining about the kinds of courses, grants etc available, and it discusses the relative advantages and disadvantages of part- or full-time work for parents with young children. Available free from the EOC, Overseas House, Quay St, Manchester M3 3HN.

Women unite

in armed snuggle



Freetown Christiana

The freetown of Christiana is a squatted community of about 1,000 people established in 1971 on the site of an old military base in Copenhagen, Denmark. It has its own shops, bars, nursery school, health clinic, windmills, workshops,

agriculture... music, art and drama. This pamphlet relates its history and its continuing struggle to survive in the face of hostile authorities. Available from Self Help Housing Resource Library, Ladbroke House, Highbury Grove, London N5 2AD, for 50p (incl. postage).

Living with an Earthquake

A gripping diary of the struggles in 1977/78 of the Left and feminists against repression in Italy. It covers the 'Historic Compromise' between the Communist Party (PCI) and the Christian Democrats, which has led to more cuts and unemployment, and to the PCI sending in its own armed thugs to smash up women, students and the unemployed. The Left there is both more imaginative and more influenced by feminists than in Britain—co-incidentally? 'Personal is Political' and having fun are accepted by a large section as basic principles. This book doesn't deal with the Red Brigade—things are changing so fast there that this book can only attempt to describe what has happened in the past. You certainly won't learn what's going on in Italy from newspapers—so read this book. 95p*

Heroine

This is the first British women's comic, produced by the Birmingham Arts Lab. There's lots of images of women being unstereotypical—like picking up bargain 'flashers' in supermarkets, or growing wings and metaphors in outer space... A nice break from all those columns of words. ZAP POW WLM NOW*

Laura Margolis

Histoire d'Elles

Another French monthly, less sumptuously produced, less cultural in emphasis and less lyrical in language than *des femmes en mouvement* (Shortlist SR 71). *Histoire d'Elles* aims to comment on all political issues, not only those defined as 'female'. The June-July issue—their sixth—has articles on repression in Argentina, women's silence in May '68, pollution in Brittany, black women organising. Women write firmly from their own experience, their own subjectivity. Available at 6 francs plus postage from 11 rue Boulard, 75014 Paris, France.

Jill Nicholls

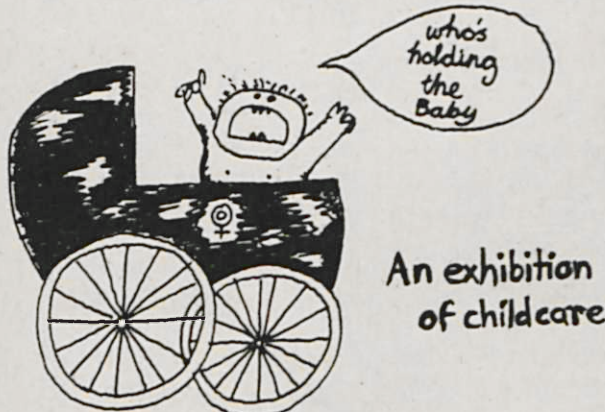
Shrew: Feminism and Nonviolence

Great articles on the Male Power Club vs. "the Softie Community"; on antifascist organising with a broad humane base; on "Ireland's English Problem" and the trouble English feminists have had getting to grips with it. But I'm still not sure about total nonviolence for women. The absence of feminism within nonviolent movements is criticised firmly here, but still suspicious. And I'm afraid there's a bit of pious waffling along the lines of "we mustn't be as nasty as men, girls". Do we ever get the chance? 40p from Lynn Blackmore, Some Friends Community, 128 Bethnal Green Rd, London E2

Amanda Sebestyen

* Indicates publications are available from the Publications Distribution Co-op, 27 Clerkenwell Close, London EC1

Hackney Flashers Collective



An exhibition of childcare

date Tuesday~Saturday, 4~29 July
place Centerprise, 136 Kingsland High St, London E8.

Diane Olson

An exhibition of feminist photography by Diane is now available for hire to women's conferences, day schools, meetings etc, for £2.50-£5 per day (plus postage and deposit). The exhibition contains 20 black and white 8" by 10" photos of women and men. For more details contact Diane Olson, 23 Banff Rd, Manchester 14 (061-236 3112 day, -224 6069 eve).

Cambridge Women's Aid

Poster for sale—£5 for 10 (incl. postage). Also a photographic exhibition of 20 boards showing the setting up of a refuge, which can be rented for £10 a week plus carriage. Both available from Dore Sadler, 15 Marshall Rd, Cambridge (0223 43706)

Birmingham Rape Crisis Group

"We are thinking seriously about setting up a crisis centre. We would like more women to be involved in the group, particularly women who would have a long-term commitment to be involved in the work of a rape crisis centre." Contact the group c/o Women's Centre, 76 Brighton Rd, Birmingham B12, or telephone Jenny 021-440 5794.

PUBLICATIONS

It's very helpful for us to receive local newsletters with local events and news in them, both for Shortlist and Newshorts—so if you put one out, could you send us a copy?

Women's Liberation—An Introduction

Copies of this pamphlet, revised and updated, are now available, to women only. 7p each, or 5p each for bulk orders of over 5 copies. "We would appreciate it if women/centres/groups offered to sell copies in their areas. An sae with your order would be appreciated!" Send inquiries to WIRES, 32 Parliament St, York (0904 35471).

Abortion, the Double Standard
Roman Catholic Feminists and Christians for Free Choice have

CENTRES

AWAZ—Asian Women's Movement

The aims of AWAZ are to help all Asian women in distress, and alleviate their isolation; to press for their emancipation; to fight racism; to monitor, and if necessary campaign against Government policies in relation to blacks. It is in the process of establishing an Asian Women's Centre in London, which

If no revolution come

If no revolution come
star clusters
will brush heavy on the sky

and grapes burst
into the mouths of fifteen
well-fed men,

these honest men
will build them houses like pork palaces
if no revolution come,

short-life dust children
will be crumbling in the sun —
they have to score like this
if no revolution come.

The sadness of people,
don't look at it too long:
you're studying for madness
if no revolution come.

If no revolution come
it will be born sleeping,
it will be heavy as baby
playing on mama's bones,

it will be gun-thumping on Sunday
and easy good time
for men who make money,

for men who make money
grow like a roof
so the rubbish of people
can't live underneath.

If no revolution come
star clusters
will drop heavy from the sky

and blood burst
out of the mouths of fifteen
washing women,

and the land-owners will drink us
one body by one:
they have to score like this
if no revolution come.

TWO POEMS

BY HELEN DUNMORE

The Polish husband

The traffic halted
and for a moment
the broad green avenue
hung like a wave,

while a woman crossing
stopped me, and said

'Can you show me my wedding?
— in which church is it going to be held?'

The lorries were hooting at her
as she stood there on the island
for her cloak fell back
and under it her legs were bare.
Her hair was dyed blonde
and her sad face deeply tanned.

I asked her, 'What is the name of your husband?'
She wasn't sure, but she knew his first name was Joe,
she'd met him in Poland
and this was the time for the wedding.

There was a cathedral behind us
and a sign to the centre of the town.
'I am not an expert on weddings'
I said, 'But take that honey-coloured building
that squats on its lawns like a cat —
at least there's music playing inside it.'

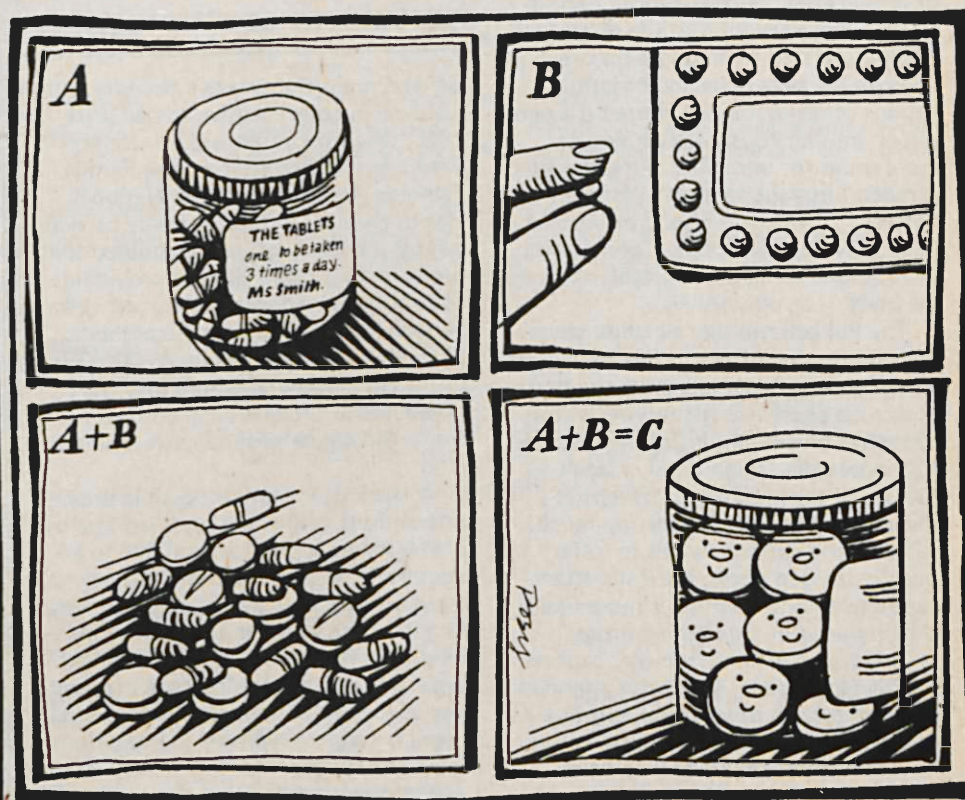
So she ran with her heels tapping
and the long, narrow folds of her cloak falling apart.
A veil on wire flew from her head,
her white figure ducked in the porch and blew out.

But Joe, the Polish man. In the rush of this town
I can't say whether she even found him
to go up the incense-heavy church beside him
under the bridal weight of her clothes,
or whether he was one of the lorry drivers
to whom her brown, hurrying legs were exposed.

When you're ill and on the Pill

Some of the drugs prescribed for common ailments can reduce the Pill's contraceptive properties.

Alex Balsdon and Eva Kaluzynska report.



POSY SIMMONDS

None of the contraceptive methods in current use is anywhere near perfect. Women still have to choose the method which is least unpleasant and dangerous for them. For many, that still means choosing the Pill.

Some of the life-threatening side effects of the Pill have gradually become apparent with its long-term use by many women. The Royal College of General Practitioners' recent report highlighted these (see SR 67) and was well publicised.

Because these side effects were thought to be due to the Pill's oestrogen content, Pills containing more than 50µg oestrogen are not now often prescribed for contraceptive purposes. Newer, supposedly safer 30µg oestrogen Pills are more widely used — although there's as yet no guarantee that lower oestrogen dose equals fewer side effects. And the problems caused by progestogen — the other component of the Pill — are only just coming to light.

So the search for a 'safer' Pill goes on. Paradoxically, one of the side effects of taking the newer, 'safer' Pills while you're ill and taking other drugs at the same time could be — pregnancy.►



ll chemically synthesised drugs have side effects, but during a short, sharp course of drug treatment they are relatively unlikely to be troublesome, or indeed noticeable. Most

drug side effects (except those caused by an allergic reaction to the drug) tend to be associated with long-term use.

Both the beneficial and harmful actions of drugs may be altered if a person is simultaneously taking two or more drugs for unrelated ailments. This is called 'drug interaction'. When drugs 'interact', the action of one or both of them may be augmented — perhaps to the point of being unacceptably toxic to the body — or diminished.

The Pill behaves like all other chemically synthesised drugs in this respect. It is now known that there are some drugs which can cause a reduction in its contraceptive properties. With the old style Pills, now called 'high dose', a small reduction in the level of contraceptive hormone should not matter too much. But with the current switch to 'safer' lower oestrogen doses, the Pill's effectiveness as a contraceptive is more likely to be reduced by interacting drugs.

Interaction is not a one-way process: the Pill can, in turn, affect the intended action of certain other drugs without losing its contraceptive properties. But the side effects are unlikely to be as dramatic as an unwanted pregnancy.

In the last few years, several reports have shown an increased incidence of breakthrough bleeding and occasional pregnancies in women taking certain other drugs concurrently with the contraceptive Pill. Breakthrough bleeding occurs when the level of hormones in the body is not sufficiently high to maintain the lining of the womb, and pregnancy in a Pill-taker is due to her having insufficient hormone to prevent ovulation. In other words, a woman on the Pill may get pregnant if its hormones cannot suppress her body's natural hormone levels — as they must do to inhibit her cycle of fertility.

At present, the reported number of pregnancies in conscientious Pill-takers is very low. This may be because the risk is small. But it could also be because doctors tend to blame pregnancies on Pill-takers' forgetfulness or stupidity, judging from a recent article in the medical press: "It has generally been assumed that loss of contraceptive efficacy has been due to patient *non-compliance*" — a quaint phrase doctors use to describe patients who don't take their medicine.



octors employed in 'family planning' clinics are less likely to assume pregnant Pill-takers are simply stupid, since they are usually well informed and up-to-date on knowledge and birth control. But not all women go to 'family planning' clinics.

At present, the reported number of pregnancies in conscientious Pill-takers is very low. This may be because the risk is small. But it also could be because doctors tend to blame pregnancies on Pill-takers' forgetfulness or stupidity . . .

General practitioners have become more involved in contraceptive advice since 1974, when the responsibility for services was transferred from the Family Planning Association to the National Health Service. In fact, a survey carried out by the FPA last year estimated that between 10-15,000 GPs are providing contraceptive services *without any proper training* in birth control methods. Since there are only about 26,000 GPs in Britain — some of whom may have opted not to provide birth control facilities — this figure is quite extraordinarily high.

A chart of known or possible drug interactions, obligingly supplied free by a drug manufacturer, is available to all doctors. Providing the chart's up-to-date, a brief glance at it should enable doctors to determine whether a drug they intend to prescribe for an ailment might interfere with the contraceptive properties of the Pill. Although this article is based on widely available information — most of which is included in such charts — that doesn't mean that the average GP has either taken any notice of it or finds it important if he or she has. So women on the Pill should make it a routine to ask their doctor whether there's any chance of interaction with another drug. Make doctors use their interaction charts.

OFFENDING DRUGS

So which drugs do we know reduce the Pill's ability to suppress the ripening of ova? Since 1971, reports of contraceptive failure have been associated with specific antibiotics, anticonvulsants (used to control epilepsy), and specific drugs acting on the central nervous system — that is, the brain and spinal cord.

Antibiotics

Antibiotics are used to combat bacterial infections. There are different types of antibiotic which kill different types of bacteria, but 'broad spectrum' antibiotics — effective against many types of bacteria — are the ones most often prescribed, especially when the doctor doesn't know which bacterium is responsible for the infection.



hen you take a course of antibiotics to fight an infection, some of the many bacteria which normally live in the gut and are involved in digestion may be killed if they are sensitive to the antibiotic. As well as helping digestion, some of these bacteria are believed (although this is not defi-

nately proved) to be important in maintaining appropriate levels of contraceptive hormone in the body. If the helpful bacteria are depleted through antibiotic therapy, the amount of contraceptive hormone absorbed into the bloodstream from the gut will also be reduced, and the hormone will be lost in the faeces instead of reaching its intended target organ.

Because of this, most antibiotics could theoretically reduce the effectiveness of the Pill. However, we presently only have definite Pill-antibiotic pregnancy connections with the following drugs:

Three pregnancies have been reported in women receiving the antibiotic **ampicillin**, and two pregnancies in women taking **chloramphenicol**. **Penicillin**, **neomycin**, **nitrofurantoin**, and some **sulphonamides** have all been associated with breakthrough bleeding — indicating that these antibiotics can reduce the Pill's desired effect.

Antituberculous drugs

At least 15 pregnancies and a high incidence of breakthrough bleeding have so far been reported in women on the Pill who were also receiving treatment for tuberculosis. **Rifampicin** — an antibiotic which is used extensively as part of the treatment against TB — is regarded as the agent which caused contraceptive failure in these women. Rifampicin is believed to cause a more rapid removal of contraceptive hormones from the body.

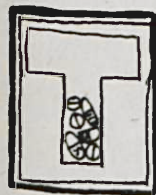
Drugs acting on the nervous system

Barbiturates can reduce the desired effects of the Pill. The term 'barbiturate' represents a large group of chemicals which can be used as tranquillisers or sleeping pills, among other things. Following the Campaign for the Use and Restriction of Barbiturates (CURB) because of their addictive properties, barbiturates are not now so freely prescribed for 'minor' ailments such as insomnia.

A study has been carried out on 51 (volunteer?) women who were being prescribed the barbiturate, **phenobarbitone** in addition to their oral contraceptives. Thirty of them developed breakthrough bleeding and one became pregnant.

Other drugs used to prevent convulsions which have been implicated in contraceptive failure include **phenytoin** and **diphenylhydantoin**. These drugs increase the rate with which oral contraceptive hormones are excreted from the body. This means that if they are prescribed,

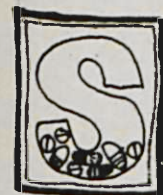
then higher concentrations of oestrogen and progestogen must be used to maintain adequate blood levels of hormone. Nine pregnancies have so far been reported for anticonvulsants.



he result of drug interaction obviously depends on several factors: it's not just 'Pill plus antibiotic (for instance) equals pregnancy'. Other factors must include the length of antibiotic treatment, the dosage of antibiotic prescribed, the time of the Pill cycle when antibiotic therapy was started, and the particular antibiotic that has been prescribed. The brand of Pill will also be an influence, since different brands contain different amounts of oestrogen and progestogen. And, of course, there is the normal biological variation of the woman concerned.

It is not really known to what extent a short course of drugs might affect the efficiency of the Pill's contraceptive properties. There have as yet been too few properly documented cases competently to answer most of the questions surrounding contraceptive failure due to drug interaction.

One of the problems in finding out whether you've been given a drug that may interact with the Pill is that general practitioners prescribe drugs by brand name (for instance, Valium) and not by their generic name (which for Valium is diazepam). We've described drugs by the latter in this article. For example, ampicillin — the antibiotic which has attracted most media attention as reducing the Pill's desired effect — has the following brand names: Amfipen, Ampiclox, Magnapen, Penbritin, Pentrexyl, and Vidopen. Some of these brand names have ampicillin as their sole active ingredient, while others are combined with other active agents.



o what can be done? A doctor could either warn you of the risks and advise additional contraceptive precautions, or 'take you off the Pill'. A third possibility is to prescribe a 'high dose' Pill containing more than 50µg oestrogen — but this rather defeats the 'safety' issue, since it was the risk of side effects which originally caused the Pills now known as 'high dose' to be banned as first-line choice for most women. The second and third courses of action seem practical possibilities only when the interacting drug has to be taken for a long time — as in the case of phenobarbitone for the epileptic.

If you want to know whether any product you've been prescribed contains a drug which could reduce the contraceptive action of the Pill, check the chart. It shows most of the commoner brand names for the drugs we've mentioned here, but isn't exhaustive.●

Brand names of oral drugs containing an agent which has been implicated in loss of the Pill's contraceptive action

Generic name Brand name

ANTIBIOTICS

ampicillin	Amfipen, Ampiclox, Magnapen, Penbritin, Pentrexyl, Vidopen
chloramphenicol	Chloromycetin, Kemicetine
penicillin group:	Aspin VK, Broxil, Crystapen G, Crystapen V, Cuprimine, CUK, Depamine, Distamine, Distaquine V-K, Econocil V-K, Havapen, GPV, Icipen, Pendural All-Purpose, Stabillin V-K, Tonsillin, V-Cil-K.
rifampicin	Rifadin, Rifinah, Rimactane, Rimactazid
neomycin	Antidiar with neomycin, Atasorb-N, Cremomycin, Donnagel with neomycin, Ivax, Kaomycin, Lomotil with neomycin, Maxitrol, Neomin, Neo-Sulfazon, Neovax, Nivemycin, Tetrazets, Unidiarea
nitrofurantoin	Berkfurin, Ceduran, Furadantin, Furan, Macrochantin, Urantoin
sulphonamides	Bactrim, Durenate, Guamycin susp., Guatrisin, Kelfizine W, Lederkyn, M. & B. 693, Madriban, Midicel, Orisulf, Penbritin KS, Septrin, Streptotriad, Sulphamagna, Sulphamezathine, Sulphatriad, Thalazole, Thiazamide, Urolucosil.

CENTRAL NERVOUS SYSTEM DRUGS

phenobarbitone	Actonorm, Actonorm Sed, Alubarb, APP, Asmal, Becosed, Belladenal, Bellergal, Bellobarb, Beplete, Cantil with phenobarbitone, Donnatal, Epanutin with phenobarbitone, Fenobelladine, Franol preps., Garoin, Heptonal, Luminal, Paminal, Parabal, Peritrate with phenobarbitone, Seominal, Tedral, Theogardenal, Theominal, Trinuride, Veriloid VP
phenytoin	Epanutin, Garoin, Mysoline with phenytoin, Trinuride

FPA Categorisation of Oral Contraceptives

Type of Pill	Brand Name	Oestrogen	Progestogen
Low oestrogen dose (FPA approved and preferred)	Microgynon 30	30µg ethinyl oestradiol	150µg levonorgestrel
	Ovranette 30	30 " "	150µg " "
	Eugynon 30	30 " "	500µg DL-norgestrel
	Ovran 30	30 " "	250µg levonorgestrel
	Brevinor	35 " "	500µg norethisterone
	Ovysmen	35 " "	500µg " "
Medium oestrogen dose combination (FPA approved)	Conova 30*	30 " "	2000µg ethynodiol diacetate
	Orlest	50 " "	1000µg norethisterone acetate
	Minovlar	50 " "	1000 " "
	Minovlar Ed	50µg ethinyl oestradiol, lactose	1000 " "
	Norlestrin	50µg ethinyl oestradiol	2500 " "
	Gynovlar 21	50 " "	3000 " "
	Anovlar 21	50 " "	4000 " "
	Demulen 50	50 " "	500µg ethynodiol diacetate
	Ovulen 50	50 " "	1000 " "
	Eugynon 50	50 " "	500µg DL-norgestrel
	Ovran	50 " "	500 " "
	Minilyn	50 " "	2500µg lynestrenol
	Ortho-Novin 1/50	50µg mestranol	1000µg norethisterone
	Norinyl-1	50 " "	1000 " "
	Norinyl 1/28	50µg mestranol, lactose	1000 " "
Progestogen only (FPA approved)	Femulen	—	500µg ethynodiol diacetate
	Micronor	—	350µg norethisterone
	Noriday	—	350µg " "
	Neogest	—	75µg DL-norgestrel
High oestrogen dose combination (not approved by FPA)**	Conovid	75µg mestranol	5000µg norethynodrel
	Conovid-E	100 " "	2500 " "
	Demulen	100 " "	500µg ethynodiol diacetate
	Ovulen 1mg	100 " "	1000 " "
Low oestrogen dose combination (under consideration by FPA)	Loestrin 20	20µg ethinyl oestradiol	1000µg norethisterone acetate

* Conova 30 was marketed earlier this year. Although it contains only 30ug oestrogen, the FPA advisers are not satisfied with its 'quality and quantity', so it's not on the 'preferred' list at present.

** not approved for contraceptive purposes. Used for menstrual disorders (heavy, irregular, or painful periods) and the 'pre-menstrual syndrome'.

Between 10-15,000 GPs are providing contraceptive services without any proper training in birth control methods . . .

WHAT EVERY WOMAN SHOULD KNOW ABOUT VIBRATORS

As the first company to introduce vibrators into the U.K. and having sold some hundred of thousands, we feel that we know more about them and their use than most.

The most important thing to remember is, **that they do work** — providing the woman has no violent prejudice against the use of artificial sexual stimulation. Some women find the shape off-putting. The phallic symbolism, deliberately created by the makers to emphasize its sexual usage, gives them the impression that it is meant to be used as an artificial penis, and indeed it can and is so used. Some women, however, find the effect — when used in this way — to be more numbing than stimulating.

The vibrator is designed and is far more effective when used for clitoral stimulation and its undoubted value for this purpose has been well established by Masters and Johnson in their book "An Analysis of Human Sexual Response." In the book they describe how, using a similar device, they were able to bring to orgasm women who have never before reached a climax.

These were extreme cases obviously. Normally, the vibrator is used to provide extra stimulation during love making and is particularly useful where the woman's response tends to be slow. And, of course, it is just as often used purely for personal pleasure.

Finally a word about quality. There are many different makes on the market today, all of similar design, ranging in quality from very good to absolutely useless. We have been selling the same model for seven years and have enough confidence in it to offer you our special money refund service if you are not satisfied.

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■ **CALLING WRITERS.** Would women who have had fiction or poetry published in Spare Rib, particularly before 1975, please send names and addresses Alison Fell at Spare Rib.

■ **WOMEN'S LIBERATION LITERATURE** or any books. Send sae for free booklist to: H. Rutovitz 31 Royal Terrace, Edinburgh.

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■ **WIRES (WOMEN'S INFORMATION, REFERRAL AND ENQUIRY SERVICE)** is the Women's Liberation Movement national information service, and also produces a twice-monthly newsletter. This contains news of conferences, events, meetings, campaigns, and other activities of the WLM; nationwide news, information and news from groups as well as articles on feminist art, health, international etc — plus reviews, letters and so on. Office opening times are: Monday to Friday 10.30-4.30. Write to us or telephone if you have a query and **SUBSCRIBE** to WIRES. Sub rates £6 a year (£4 if poor); group rates £12 a year (£8 if poor) for 2 copies of each issue. Individual copies at 20p each. Copies are also available on a sale-or-not-pay basis. Individual copies 10p each, 32A Parliament Street, York, 0904 35471.

■ **SAPPHO** lesbian/feminist magazine, 50p including post. Basement, 20 Dorset Square, London NW1. Meetings Tuesdays 7.30pm, Chepstow Pub, Chepstow Place, London W2.

■ **DONNA**, an international feminist publication, produced in Italy in 5 languages, bimonthly. Please send news and subscribe, £2.50 a year, to E.L. 66 Perrers Road, London W6.

SCARLET WOMEN

(The newsletter of the Socialist-feminist current). ISSUE 8 will be about *The Roots of Fascism*. We want to examine the consciousness and attitudes prevalent in patriarchal class society which could provide a breeding-ground for the growth of a mass fascist movement. DEADLINE: September 22nd. Articles 1500 words max.—letters typed on white A4 paper if possible—cartoons and cartoon ideas, thoughts and discussion points also welcome.

THE SCARLET WOMEN COLLECTIVE, 5 Washington Terrace, North Shields, Tyne & Wear.
Subscription £1 for 3 issues, bulk orders welcome.

Remember that Spare Rib 75 is to be a special 'Education' issue with features on sexism at all levels of schooling and training, **plus** a FREE POSTER! If you can help us get it into schools and colleges, please contact Susan Hemmings at Spare Rib as soon as possible.

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■ Blackrose Press is a libertarian-communist/feminist printing col-lective. We are looking for a fourth worker, preferably with some experience. Blackrose Press, 30 Clerkenwell Close, London EC1. 01-251 3043

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■ A tired free school needs new workers with plenty of energy and practical skills to re-establish our existence. Possibly paid work-step scheme applied for. Contact: Ammie Killin, Delta Free School, 43 Mount Pleasant Road, Newtown, Southam-pton.

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classified groups

Note: New reduced classified ad rates for sisters looking for or starting local women's liberation groups. 5p/word; 7p/capitals; 30p box numbers.

- Any feminist/lesbian women want to start a group Northants area? Phone Rushden 56090—Gill or Fran.
- FEMINISTS in or near Croydon! There is now an active Women's Group. Phone Viv 01 764 8519.
- ROMAN CATHOLIC feminists, unite! 01-886 0779 Box 699.
- CUMBRIA. Are there any feminist groups in Cumbria — or nearest. Box 737.

contacts

- Woman with pre-school age child wanted to co-own bookshop/toyshop, share childcare. Anyone interested contact Vivien and Joanna (2½), Caudlish, 2 Fairhill Cottage, Alston, Cumbria.
- Christian feminist, moving to Eastbourne shortly. Like minded contacts please? Box 736.
- FEMINIST, 32, starting community work course at WARWICK UNIVERSITY, seeks accommodation. Box 738.
- Woman, 27, moving to work in South Birmingham seeks roomin flat/house from July 23rd. Box 739.
- Gay woman, film maker, vegetarian seeks room in feminist women's house or flat. London. Box 740.
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- Lady 32 West Midlands, seeks friendship with cool, strong minded compassionate female, gay or het. Box 742.
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- Girl student, vegetarian, socialist, feminist, seeks similar. Norfolk area. Box 745.

- Young man, 26, seeks young lady for friendship in Bath or nearby area. Photo appreciated. Box 732.

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- Young community offers land, workshop space and more. Needs people. Congenial atmosphere. To exchange details write the Omega Point, near Oswestry or phone 0691 3393.

- American guy wishes to meet English girl with marriage in view. Box 726.

- Gay/bisexual woman wanted share life on smallholding in Dyfed with similar woman. Must like children. Box 734.

- Very attractive, intelligent, 21 year old female bisexual living in Cornwall, happily tied with male nevertheless needs close relationship with gay or bisexual female. Box 735.

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events

- T.U.L.C. National Museum of Labour History, Sunday lecture 6 August 3pm "The women of the Paris Commune" by Moira Johnson. Museum open 2-6pm except while lecture is in progress. Refreshments and literature available. Further details National Museum of Labour History, Limehouse Town Hall, Commercial Road, London E14. 01-515 3229. Nearest tubes Aldgate, Mile End. Buses 15,23,40, 5,106,277.

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Radical Midwives

inform the staff if she felt anything going wrong.)

Anyway, they began to think that something was up and took her to theatre. As they cut through her skin and muscle layer, they saw the uterus rupturing along the scar line and were just able to save the baby and the woman. And this woman was *grateful* to the doctors and the hospital. They had blinded her with science and covered up their complete blunder and mis-management of her labour.

Defining our aims

Gradually we became frustrated with hearing over and over again the horrors of maternity care. We wanted to decide what to do about it. Previously we had described ourselves as a study and support group, but now we had business matters that required time for decision making.

We finally decided to call ourselves the Association of Radical Midwives. (The initials ARM in obstetric terminology stand for artificial rupture of membranes—with obvious implications for getting things moving and stirring them up). In January 1977 we structured our six weekly meetings to which about 20 people come. Friday evenings (and every opportunity between sessions) are for reunions and 'horror stories'. Saturday is a day of study, when we share practical skills and open discussions on different topics. Sometimes we have outside speakers. We have covered such subjects as breast-feeding, psychoprophylaxis, active management of labour, the use of ultrasound, infant awareness and blood taking. Sunday, our business day, has become more and more hectic.

Early on we discussed the directions we could go in. Did we want to set up an alternative birth centre? Or were we going to be a more general pressure group? Or could we take on both? The birth centre project seems to have been shelved for the moment. Our main problems were how to fund it and how to be alternative and yet within the National Health Service.

In the summer of 1977 an article about us appeared in the *Sunday Times*. The response was quite overwhelming. We were certainly not prepared for dealing with over 100 enquiries. At our next meeting after that article was published, we had to set out the nitty-gritty of our aims and how we were going to organise. We decided:

- we aim to restore the role of the midwife for the benefit of childbearing women and their babies.
- Our objectives are:
 - to re-establish the confidence of the midwife in her own skills.
 - to share ideas, skills and information.
 - to encourage midwives in their support of a woman's active participation in birth.
 - to reaffirm the need for midwives to provide continuity of care.

- to explore alternative patterns of care.
- to encourage evaluation of developments in our field.

The group felt we should avoid any hierarchical structure or elite executive. We wanted our organisation to be on womanly lines and not to fall into the pitfalls of male dominated organisations, such as unions or churches, that are bogged down with bureaucracy and power at the top. We decided that as an organisation of midwives for midwives we did not need full-time employees. We would rather work slowly, but with the support of the whole group, than quickly and 'efficiently' without grass roots participation.

So we set up autonomous regional groups and decided to maintain our six weekly meetings as the national policy decision making body. We hoped to have an annual national conference which would be a general meeting place and platform for ideas, but not responsible for making decisions. Meanwhile it was still necessary to have a secretary, treasurer and publicity co-ordinator. These three are answerable to the whole group and if problems come up between meetings, they can consult with the regional group contacts.

The 'radical' label

Recently we have been struggling to define our political position. People question our label 'radical'. The Central Midwives Board (the statutory body responsible for midwifery) felt unable to send a representative to our recent conference on "Midwives and the Law", not wanting to be 'partisan'. The Royal College of Midwives (the midwives' professional association) had some other excuse. It was apparent that without us outlining our position, or even consciously *having* a position, the establishment had decided what our relationship to it was.

There were fears that we might be alienating whole groups of midwives and missing important opportunities if we were to stand outside or against the Royal College of Midwives. Nonetheless, general consensus was that we are 'radical' in that we are a grass roots organisation, wanting to restore the roots of midwifery, and that we are 'feminist' in that we are doing this for all women to have the right of control over their bodies in pregnancy, labour and the post-natal period. We also feel we are more likely to gain support through involvement in the trade unions (in our case, NUPE or COHSE) than in the Royal College of Midwives.

Where next?

It seems that we have taken on quite a struggle and that to restore the role of the midwife is a hard task. Jobs for midwives are becoming fewer, especially on the district, where they do have a certain amount of autonomy. Many Area Health

Authorities have definite policies to phase out the district midwife.

As the national policy is towards 100% hospital confinements (despite reassuring noises from Ennals) the district midwife is not needed for delivery. Also much of the ante-natal care is being undertaken in hospital. The post-natal care, it is argued by administrators and some health workers, could be shared by district nurse/midwife and health visitors.

We must fight this trend. Child-bearing women need the continuity of care that district midwives can give. Direct entry training for student midwives (starting to train as a midwife without previous nursing training) is also being phased out, the excuse being to bring us into line with the EEC. But in Holland, for instance, all midwives are direct entry and have a three year midwifery training. Without direct entry, women who really wish to become midwives are denied the option unless they are prepared to go through nurse training first.

The struggle of midwives to have their skills recognised is part of the increasing awareness amongst women of their oppression. We need to keep and add to our store of knowledge of normal birth processes before it is too late—to add to our woman-tending, not machine-tending skills.

Student midwives are conditioned to doubt their own skills and accept an inferior status to doctors. This conditioning is easy since, as women, we are all conditioned and trained to be supportive to others (especially men—our boyfriends, husbands, children) and not to recognise the potential of our own talents.

If midwives and nurses are to challenge the medical establishment, student midwives and other trainees need support so that they can take back the power of their own knowledge and skills. ■

By Jenny Spinks—with thanks to everyone who talked about it, especially Mavis Kirkham, Pippa Mackeith, Chris Allen and Caroline Mackeith.

Contacts

Association of Radical Midwives—contact Jen Flintham, 12a John St, Cambridge for general information. ARMS send out the minutes of each six weekly meeting (£2 to subscribe to the mailing list) and also hope to do a quarterly newsletter (also £2)—contact Jenny Spinks, 8 Burngreave Bank, Pitsmoor, Sheffield 4

AIMS (Association for the Improvement in Maternity Services), c/o Christine Beels, 19 Broomfield Cres, Leeds 6

National Childbirth Trust, 9 Queensborough Terrace, London W2

Society to Support Home Confinements c/o Margaret White, 17 Laburnam Ave, Durham City, Co. Durham.

Worth reading

Midwives and Medical Men by Jean Donnison (Heinemann £6.50)

The Childbirth Book by Christine Beels (Turnstone £2.50)

Our report on Perth Women's Health Care House (SR 67) was too scathing. As well as the usual facilities, it has started a programme of preventive medicine at factories employing a lot of women and it houses the Australian Women Against Rape office, which does counselling and research.

I am the daughter of peasants, of middle peasants, and my parents were able to send me to school. They spoke Galician to each other but to us they spoke Castilian (high Spanish)—I didn't learn Galician until later: I don't speak it.

In Galicia the cultural level is very low. There aren't many schools. Only 20% of children go to school, mainly children of the privileged classes, of course. Teaching is done in Castilian which is a foreign language for the children who speak only Galician at home.

What's more, people despise themselves. They *feel* Galician but are ashamed to speak their language. Once at a meeting there was a woman who spoke Castilian badly, she was a peasant but still she preferred to speak Castilian because of this hatred for her own language, because of all the discrimination her language involves.

In the Basque country it's different, they have pride. Not so long ago in the Basque country, to be called Galician was an insult. Galicians and Andalusians were very much looked down on. There was a lot of immigration to the Basque country

it's the women who take the lead

... And the Galician women are very different too, from the women of other regions in Spain. They are the ones who educate the children and they are often the ones who buy the farms with money sent to them by their emigrant husbands: there are even villages where inheritance passes from mother to daughter, without going through the husband.

In the peasant associations it's the women who do the fighting. At the moment there are confrontations between the big land-owners and the peasants, and in this struggle it's the women who take the lead, who confront the military police, because they are more determined, more full of fight. It's the same with the struggles over fishing. There's a very high percentage of women in Galicia's fish canning industry. Only the factories are in the hands of men. The foremen call the women all kinds of names—prostitutes, sows—partly because the women who work in the factories come from the poorest and lowest classes.

The peasants still live as though it were the last century.

a matriarchy?

There are other surprising things: for example there are villages where the families are very isolated still and sometimes the girls don't get married, they reach 30 or 34 and if they're not married, they have a baby. This situation is

Galician hairdresser talks

Soon after publishing an article in SR70 on Galicia*, a woman-dominated region in north-west Spain, we came across this interview in a French feminist magazine. At a Basque women's festival in Bilbao, women from *des femmes en mouvements* met a Galician woman called Mara who runs a hairdressing salon. She told them how she's made her salon into a place where women come to talk and how feminists in Galicia have protested against the sexism of the big stores.

The article leaves questions unanswered about the way modern capitalist-sexism affects a society where women have traditionally had so much control — it must affect the way the women's movement organises? — but we like the different angle it gives on Galicia, and the idea of the revolutionary potential of a hairdressing salon!

considered normal. It's to pass on the inheritance, and to have company.

in summer, the women go to the sea

There are still a lot of witches. Nowadays in summer there's a festival during which the women go down to the sea to be purified. Afterwards the priest expels demons from everyone—paralytics, melancholics... the women beg for their demons to be taken out of them.

Here when you finish school there's a problem: do you continue your education or drop it? In my case I might have gone on if I'd been pushed a bit. I stopped. Then I had to learn something, so I learnt hairdressing. After that I had to choose a place; hairdresser's run by women are very rare. They learn a little then they get married. So if you have the chance you open your own shop.

But once you've managed to earn your living, there's another problem, because running a hairdresser's doesn't fill your life.

a place where plenty of women come

... You start by asking yourself questions, then you come into contact with different people, sometimes with left groups, and little by little you change your lifestyle... little by little this change leads you to the women's struggle, and you try to make what you feel fit in with what you do, to bring a women's consciousness to your hairdressing salon.

A hairdresser's is a place, in Spain at least, where plenty of women come. But what can you

do to have things as you'd like them? For a start, women here are crazy about romances and papers about pop stars. In hairdressing salons all you find by way of magazines are romances. So you start by taking all that stuff away and trying to put something else there, weekly papers for instance. For three or four years I had underground papers too—they're very hard to get hold of.

And then I had the few magazines you could call progressive in this country.

meanwhile, we talk...

As in any hairdressing salon, it's almost always the same women who come again and again, each at her own rhythm, once a week, once a month...

Women talk more at a beauty parlour, because at the hairdresser's there are too many people listening. So they talk about themselves as though it were happening to someone else. In the beauty cubicle, they are relaxed. Often the problem comes up of women deserted by their husbands, left alone with the children.

Generally I don't give advice because that can get complicated. When I can, I tell them what options they really have...

married and a virgin

It's unbelievable! One woman got married and they still don't really have a sexual relationship. She was married very young, she hadn't had sex before marriage, and now she's been married to him for five years! And he's not 'impotent' either, which makes it difficult for her to demand a separation on those grounds. Just a year ago she didn't speak about it, or very little and she didn't talk

about separation. She was already at war with her husband but she was still looking for ways to appeal to him.

She went to see doctors and gynaecologists and they wanted to see her husband. But he didn't go. Look, here's a man who marries a woman, ignores her for five years and when she asks him to see a doctor to find out if it's a physical problem, to see if they can reach some understanding he won't go!

Well, she doesn't want to stay with him any longer. She won't sleep with him any more. They still live together and she's afraid he might try some sort of rape. In her case, virginity is the only thing that can get her a divorce! A fantastic story? Something like this happens every day here!

sacked for refusing to give in to her boss

There's another amazing thing here, I don't know if it happens in other countries. The sales-girls in some shops, like the 'Corte Ingles' for instance, big monopolies like that, are chosen entirely for their looks. Marketing techniques need them to be pretty to attract customers.

A while ago we demonstrated against the 'Corte Ingles'. They have shops all over the place. There were only about 350 of us out of a population of about 50,000, which is very few. They had just sacked a woman because she refused to give in to her boss, to prostitute herself. She was very young and had terrific problems. I mean they made her sign a statement. After she'd signed, her parents, who are pretty reactionary, were angry with her. She had to leave the demonstration because people were pointing at her and saying "Look at her, that's the one who didn't want to get off with her boss! She can't be a nice girl, she can't be innocent, if something like that happened to her!"

There are thousands of women like that who are beginning to become aware; then they ask what they can read, but at the moment there's not much written by women, just a few rather clinical texts which obviously don't meet our needs.

We shall carry on. Women are showing their strength already and we can go further. We have enormous possibilities.

* Available from us at 40p inc. postage.

Opposite page: Photocollage 1960 by Sarah Schumann—reprinted from the German feminist journal *Die Schwarze Botin*



REVIEWS

FILMS

THE STEPFORD WIVES

Directed by Bryan Forbes
(Contemporary Films)

There's this beautiful little town in Connecticut, and all the men work nearby in the big chemical and computer firms (that's except for the friendly local policeman, and that nice little quiet guy who earns a fortune drawing pinup pictures . . .) And all the women look just like Playboy centre-folds, only they dress in frilly broderie anglaise and stay home and keep their enormous kitchens spotless and never think about anything except making their husbands and children happy. The men meet every night, at the Men's Association of course. The women meet at the supermarket. Once, it's true, there was a Women's Club, with some of those women's lib speakers. But then the women grew up. Made a mature adjustment. Stopped being selfish. And now everything's just fine. "She cooks as good as she looks, pal."

And then one day along comes this couple from out of town and the wife (who's Katharine Ross) looks and looks and finally she starts thinking *the women are all*

dead. And the men want it that way. Well, she's got to be crazy, hasn't she?

It's a real horror story. And the beauty of it is, the Living Dead are just the women Hollywood's been trying to make us into for the last 30 years: women who can turn a consciousness-raising meeting into a TV commercial. That's why the tension never lets up. You just can't believe the heroine is really this scruffy suffering screwed-up human female, no bra flat shoes, messy kitchen (well, quite), lines on her face when she cries . . . Half the horror scenes are just *scenes from any ordinary film*: huge glossy houses, boring middle-aged men with beautiful fawning women, sweet kids who'd sooner have their mother a full-time slave than a part-time photographer, the occasional spirited female like Paula Prentiss working through her temporary rebellion and diving into domesticity and "an uplift padded bra; I just want to look like a woman!" And surely lovely immaculate Nanette Newman isn't going to be shown up as a zombie? So when the compassionate female shrink appears, you really don't know whether she's likely to help Katharine

Ross out with a sisterly talk or dope her up to the eyeballs and, a second honeymoon, courtesy of the Men's Association.

It seems the American public didn't really know what to make of this film; it's taken four years to cross the Atlantic and it's still a bit of a puzzle. For a start, the original *Stepford Wives* was a best-seller by Ira Levin, his next in line after *This Perfect Day*—which must be one of the all-time classics of sexual conservatism!

But the book and the film are certainly meant to be more than commercial shots at some new 'women's lib market'. They're also *sincere* attempts to catch up with a new reality: Look, Ira Levin and the director Bryan Forbes are saying, the Cold-War female (Marilyn Monroe slaving over a hot apple pie), she's out of date. Here comes the new model—artistic, independent, free—if you can afford the domestic help; as Paula Prentiss says, what's spooky about Stepford is "It's like maids have been declared illegal!" (Housework for Maids, OK). But in trying for a nice liberal up-to-date angle on women within such a very conventional form as the commercial horror movie, I think *The Stepford Wives* actually broke through into some surprisingly rebellious images. Perhaps that's why it's being marketed here as an art film. And why Bryan Forbes turned from his first strange Hollywood venture to *The Slipper and the Rose*, that heartwarming, traditional romantic load of old English tralala . . .

Amanda Sebestyen

COMING HOME

Directed by Hal Ashby

(United Artists)

Coming Home explores on Hollywood celluloid issues which used to be confined to the newsletters of America's left—namely, the crisis in the lives of ordinary Americans which began in the late '60s as USAF planes decanted thousands of flag-draped coffins and young amputees back into a country ill-prepared for them. The film also shows quite starkly how ill-prepared the veterans were to re-enter normal (!) peacetime and family life when for years they'd lived the more brutal intimacy of a macho buddy-hood forged in combat.

Jane Fonda, nervous and eager in 60s bouffant and mini-skirt, plays Sally Bender—vocation, cheerleader, who's dutifully married to rapier-backed Bruce Dern—vocation, hero. While Dern is in Vietnam trying to cope with the sight of his men decapitating the Cong, Fonda rooms with a girlfriend and helps out at the LA Army hospital, where she meets and eventually falls in love with a crippled, irascible veteran (Jon Voigt). Her relationship with Voigt and with her room-mate—whose fiancée is under Dern's command—deepens the chasm between her and her husband. Her anger at the way the Volunteers Committee and hospital management play down the real plight of the casualties makes her start questioning the US adventure in S E Asia. Voigt's bitterness turns to militancy too when another inmate commits suicide on the ward. He chains his wheelchair across the Draft Centre gates, and goes on to speak out publicly against the war.

When Dern comes home to find that his wife has been unfaithful both ideologically and sexually, he can't find the emotional equipment to deal with the new situation, and falls back on his Army rifle. A triangular scene follows in which I found Voigt's brothers-together-against-the-war intervention so soft-centred and patronising that I hid my eyes for fear Dern—in the throes of rigid masculine hysteria—would blow him to bits. Although scenes like this might embarrass a few men's groups, I found the film's portrayal of machismo in crisis pretty convincing.

Fonda acts Sally Bender's stumblings from conformity to politicisation with tenderness and precision, and Dern is moving as the all-American hero going into self-destruct. It's a pity that the film doesn't give a hint of the size of



Ideal wives, Stepford style

collective action, against the war, though—some documentary footage of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War would have situated the characters' individual changes more precisely.

Alison Fell

AN UNMARRIED WOMAN

Directed by Paul Mazursky
(20th Century Fox)

The plot is all too familiar after *Caddie* (reviewed *SR* 68). Deserted wife struggles bravely on till she finds happiness in the arms of another man. *Caddie*, set in 1930s Australia, makes much of material hardship—kicked out of the marital home, clutching the kiddies, *Caddie* works in bars and lives in bedsits with bedbugs. *An Unmarried Woman*, set in right-up-to-the-minute New York, sticks to the emotional struggle—guilty husband even coughs up for therapy twice a week, for wife and daughter. In both films the heroine finds a romance more meaningful than marriage, making a gesture towards independence by not immediately doing exactly as Lover Boy wants.

An Unmarried Woman is much more hip about it, liberal chic with a smattering of feminist jargon. Though ultimately soft about men, there are some snappy scenes on the way. Husband Martin (Michael Murphy) still hiding his year-long affair, steps in dog shit as he jogs along the riverbank with wife Erica (Jill Clayburgh). "The longer I'm married to you the more you sound like my mother" he screams petulantly as she wipes the shit off his shoe. The more he makes her into his mother...

Once he's gone, she's suddenly sensitised to sexism. The family doctor asks her out for a drink—"Is that a pass?" "No, it's an invitation for a drink." "Well how come you never asked me when I was married?" A man she's had lunch with edges up to her in a taxi—she tries reason, he still pounces, she screams and shoves him out into the thick of a highway.

She confronts Martin firmly when he soft-talks her about "being friends"; she gets support through the break-up from her three best woman friends—"Do you know anything about consciousness-raising?" "Nope!" "Neither do we—we just get together once a week and complain."

And alas that's all there is to it. When successful artist Saul (Alan Bates) appears on the screen, the ending is inevitable, punctuated with slow shots of them kissing in his attic, empty spaces for our romantic thoughts to

fill. Saul gets into a fight for her good name, which just proves it's True Love. He makes clear he's jealous and fiery and wants to possess her—cut to her glowing with joy, skating round a rink hand in hand with her girlfriends. Even the cynical man-hater of the bunch (well, she loves men but doesn't trust them) advises Erica to get stuck in there—Saul is special.

I wanted to like this film, knowing that the critics at the press screening were scoffing at the dead-pan therapy scenes, the crying, the outbursts against men. Aspects could be consciousness-raising in Britain—the frank-



Husband Martin and wife Erica jogging towards separation

ness between mother and 15 year old daughter, the idea of four women meeting regularly at all—but it's just another of those films made by a man with women in mind. In defence of divorce, you could say—a pretty woman (with plenty of money) can pull through, and find that "love is much sweeter the second time around".

Jill Nicholls

THE BRUTE

Directed by Gerry O'Hara

The Brute is an extremely disturbing film. It is a male sadistic fantasy combined with occasional 'realistic' scenes to give it the deceptive appearance of a study of matrimonial violence. Advertised as a documentary, it's presented as a thriller, complete with miss-a-heart-beat music.

It is the story of two women. Diane is a successful fashion model married to a wealthy company director who perfectly fits all the

myths about men who beat their wives being either sexually perverted or alcoholic. He whips her awake, puts on one of her dresses, a wig and make-up, and finally tries to brand her with a branding iron. Millie's story is very real and so, deceptively, makes Diane's credible.

Thrown in as an extra, Diane is raped by her 'un-aggressive' friend. The rape is of course portrayed as seduction, and Diane of course gives in and enjoys it. The only good thing about the film was the number of people who walked out.

On opening night in London, the National Women's Aid Federation and local women's groups picketed the two cinemas where the film was showing. They leafleted the audience with information about *The Brute* and myths about battered women. In Sunderland women told the director exactly what they thought of it! Claire Fazan

BOOKS

THE ROCKING OF THE CRADLE AND THE RULING OF THE WORLD

by Dorothy Dinnerstein
(Souvenir Press £5.00)

Women writers have looked at orthodox psycho-analytic thought and argued persuasively that we have much to learn from it, even if we have to reject and reformulate some of it in the light of our increasing knowledge about our sexuality, our physiology and our changing consciousness of our position in society. The emphasis is on discovering how females become little girls, then oppressed and conflicted women, and how males become little boys and grow up to learn not only overt but also very subtle methods of maintaining their power.

Dorothy Dinnerstein's new book is a fascinating attempt to clarify some of the origins and subtle manifestations of cultural attitudes towards women, and to put forward a clear prescription for change. Her thesis is simple: if male-female gender arrangements carry on as they are with women as the main caretakers of infants, mother-reared men will continue to view women (and, she claims, by extension all our natural environment) with both an idealised vision and—because a mother can never live up to this image of perfection and must always disappoint—a mixture of fear, loathing and lack of respect. Since female children are also reared by women they identify with their mothers and

share this ambivalence. Inevitably, they too perpetuate these awesome images of womanhood.

In Dinnerstein's view the world can only be saved by men participating in child-rearing from the earliest moment. She argues that this is now technologically and economically possible. She gives no practical or political advice on how gender arrangements should be reorganised, but describes why she thinks that this is of the greatest importance. Painting a very dismal picture of human relationships, she deplores the double standard of sexual behaviour, the tendency of men and women to regard each other as silly, over-grown children, and the image of women as untrustworthy and malevolent at the same time as being "a natural resource to be harvested and mined". Dinnerstein draws heavily from the writings of Melanie Klein and Norman O. Brown and postulates a childhood crisis which could be solved very differently if the first object of love and hate were both a man and a woman. If I understand her correctly she is saying that as long as women take it upon themselves to be the sole object for a baby's ambivalence, and are encouraged to do so by men, they will get all the subsequent shit. Men will be let off the hook but feel inadequate and resentful at the same time and retaliate in various 'masculine' ways. So a cultural neurosis is perpetuated.

Simple though this idea is, the book is a vast project which draws on many sources, and it inevitably suffers from the attempt to simplify very complex theory. Dinnerstein's persistent efforts to mitigate this by the use of footnotes, boxes, parentheses and apologies make it sometimes clumsy, chaotic and irritating. However, despite her pessimism her book is neither bitter, cynical nor punitive. And it does offer some constructive

COMPENDIUM

Fat is a Feminist Issue
by Susie Orbach, £3.00

The Rocking of the Cradle and the ruling of the World
by Dorothy Dinnerstein, £2.95

Literary Women
by Ellen Moers, £2.50
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ideas towards change, although under what conditions a cultural revolution such as this would be possible is quite another matter.

Alison Swan

LITERARY WOMEN

by Ellen Moers

(The Women's Press £2.50)

This book is a pleasure to read—intelligent, full of insights and information. It provides a chart for the journey across two centuries of women's writing, English, French and American, past the great landmarks (Austen, George Sand and George Eliot) into obscure corners (Madame de Genlis) and enables one to plan excursions and make fresh connections between autobiography, fiction, poetry and history. Ellen Moers covers an enormous range of material with an ease and informality that give the reader a sense of both recognition and discovery.

Her method is suggestive rather than systematic. After introducing Elizabeth Barrett Browning and George Sand as representative literary women, she looks at the theme of slavery: starting from a quote by Barrett Browning on the American Civil War, she pauses to take issue with Virginia Woolf on whether writing should be partisan, then moves to the case of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, speculates on the way women writers have traditionally taken up the cause of other oppressed groups, returns to England to quote John Stuart Mill's parallel between the American slave and the English wife "without even her own cabin", and thence to *Jane Eyre* and the heroine's use of the slave metaphor.

In the course of this she raises vital questions for all feminists: the social function of literature, displacement and identification between oppressed subjects, and intertextuality—the sense of women writers haunted by the lives and writing of other women, their consciousness shaped by and shaping future generations of women.

Despite my admiration for the book I have two criticisms: the category of 'heroinism' which structures the second section doesn't stand without a discussion of 'the hero' in fiction generally and, related to this, the larger issue of how far women's literature can be understood in isolation from that of men. Feminist historians, whilst tracing the history of women's particular political struggles, do so in relation to an analysis of social forces as a whole, and so I think we must do with literary history.

Jean Radford

WOMEN ARTISTS

Recognition and Reappraisal from the Early Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century

by Karen Petersen and

J J Wilson

(The Women's Press £3.95)

"Our aim is to accumulate in one place as much information as we have found thus far on the lives of women artists... The illustrations must speak for themselves as we are not able to give them the formal analysis of trained art historians. Nor do we try at this point in our research to compare and connect our artists with the better known male artists of the same period."



Sofonisba Anguissola (1535/40–1625), *Portrait of an old woman* (possibly a self portrait)

Petersen and Wilson fulfil their aims. The book, originally published in the USA two years ago, provides a great deal of information (mostly about European and American women, although there is a chapter on Chinese painters) with a wide range of illustrations, sensitively selected quotations from the artists themselves, and a comprehensive bibliography. It enables us to refute once and for all the myth that there have never been any women artists.

Much recent feminist art history has had of necessity to concentrate on rescuing women artists from oblivion. Petersen and Wilson's book belongs with Eleanor Tuft's *Our Hidden Heritage* and Ann Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin's *Women Artists 1550–1950*—books which have provided women art students and artists with a sense of their own history, with an alternative view to the dominating male model of creativity.

Women Artists, like many works that have come out of women's studies, is personal, accessible, and the methods and intentions are demystified. Above all it conveys the excitement feminists experienced at the re-discovery of women artists.

Yet the kind of book written by Petersen and Wilson raises important issues about how we go about rediscovering

our history and how we develop feminist art history. Our own research has shown that the silence on women artists is of recent origin—a twentieth century development. The last major works on women were published in 1904 and 1905, *Women Painters of The World* by Walter Sparrow and an encyclopaedia of almost a thousand women artists by Clara Clement.

To some extent Petersen and Wilson take us back to the Victorian and Edwardian treatment of women; they named them, documented them but discussed their work in a peculiarly dead end way. Women's work was stereotyped as the inevitable product of some essential femininity, their art was located in a special category reserved for women and separated from the mainstream. Putting women artists and their work in an amplified dictionary called *Women Artists* as Petersen and Wilson do, re-creates that pattern. And although Petersen and Wilson do not connect women by some notion of essential femininity,



Elizabeth Vigee Lebrun (1755–1842), *Self portrait with her daughter*

in practice they still suggest there is some link between women artists down the ages simply because they are all the same sex. Of course, women's experiences within any culture do lead them to work differently to men but we can only understand how if we look at their art in its specific historical circumstance.

Petersen and Wilson make an important comment on the narrowness of Art History's criteria and values: "The dangers of having a fixed or unexamined art history perspective is that it all too frequently predisposes us to look only at certain kinds of art, to see only certain superstars, chosen by biased criteria." But without an art historical perspective how can we understand the ways women operated within or against the art practice of their time? Does it help to have books which put women's names on the map

but give us no indication of the way women operated within their culture, or from what particular place in history they worked. For example, why did women paint so many self portraits? Is it because all women have always been narcissistic, or was it necessary for women artists to advertise themselves as women artists to their prospective patrons? How does a self portrait by the sixteenth century artist Sofonisba Anguissola, painted when it was relatively rare for artists to paint themselves, differ from a self portrait by Elizabeth Vigee Lebrun painted in the eighteenth century when the notion of woman as beautiful object made it particularly significant that a woman artist advertised herself as beautiful? Unless we investigate whether women worked like their male colleagues or differed, choosing certain dominant styles over others, whether they came from similar class backgrounds or from different places in society, we cannot begin to understand the art they made.

Putting all women artists together in chronological order down six centuries follows the format of conventional Art History books like E H Gombrich's *Story of Art*—books which suggest that art is born out of genius and artistic influences, independent of social factors. Unless Feminist Art History breaks with established formats, once the excitement of re-discovery ebbs, our books will end up as narrow and boring as so much contemporary Art History. And unless we consider the social, psychological and political factors affecting women's art, we will simply produce sentimental celebrations of Great Ladies—'Women's Story of Art' which will leave art historical values intact, confirming rather than analysing and challenging the mythology of the artist that has developed since the Renaissance.

Griselda Pollock and
Rozsika Parker

FAT IS A FEMINIST ISSUE

by Susie Orbach

(Paddington Press £3.95)

When I was first introduced to Susie Orbach's ideas on compulsive eating and body image two years ago, they immediately made sense to me. Here at last was an explanation for my seemingly irrational behaviour and anxieties. The fundamental principle of the theory is that being fat is a subconscious response which some women develop to the inequality of the sexes in our society: "Fat is *not* about lack of self control or lack of will

power. Fat is about protection, sex, nurturance, strength, boundaries, mothering, substance, assertion and rage."

Paradoxically then, compulsive eating can be seen as a positive rejection of a sexist society although for the individual woman it is usually experienced as painful, isolating, illogical and frightening behaviour. The book provides women with the methods for reclaiming the emotions behind the fat and acting on them rather than suppressing them through compulsive eating. By many case studies drawn from her practice as a therapist in New York and London, Susie Orbach builds up a full picture of the type of experiences women will bring to therapy on this issue.

Designed partially as a self help manual *Fat is a Feminist Issue* outlines a therapeutic model for women attempting to start a group. Exercises and activities to explore and uncover the meaning of the fat are explained in detail. In relation to food, deprivation and dieting are firmly rejected. This method aims to break the addiction by helping a woman to tune in to her own body messages, experience hunger, and then learn to eat with no rules or regulations.

Beyond its immediate self-help function the book is important as a picture of feminist therapy in practice. The voices of many women speak loudly and clearly through its pages.

Pat Cochrane

BRAVO TO GIRLS AND HEROES

by Wendy Mulford

MARXISM FOR INFANTS

by Denise Riley

(both available from Street

Editions, 31 Pantom Street,

Cambridge 60p + p&p).

Wendy Mulford's project in this collection of her poems is awedly "to indicate some of the problems facing a woman poet today"; to point to some of the strategies she has used to confront those problems and to attempt to reclaim language for herself as a woman. She focuses on the whirligig of everyday life, on the sort of events which sometimes get dismissed by male critics as feminine domestic trivia.

Wendy Mulford is like a hunter (huntress?) stalking meaning, constructing nets of words in which to trap meaning. She records her ambivalent feelings precisely and honestly, yet, at the same time, because her meaning is complicated, because her subjective truth has to be searched for, she creates a complex system of symbols

for the reader to unravel. This is sometimes hard but always rewarding work, for she is a generous and humble poet, leaving her poems open, insisting that the reader participates in constructing their meaning.

She raises constant implicit questions about what language can and can't say, often surrounding an austere and short poem with pressing and urgent silence and whiteness. On another level, she reclaims the validity of individual experience in exquisite singing lyrical lines: "this dusk is composed of a million elements not more delicate than ours/our common our remarkable air". The drawings by Julia Ball which accompany the text work not merely as illustrations but as explorations of space in the same minimal mode that many of the poems adopt.

Denise Riley also writes of sex and the reclaiming of language: "The work is/e.g. to write 'she' and for that to be a statement/of fact only and not a strong image/of everything which is not-you, which sees you". Her poems probe at the distinctions possible between what is natural and what is social, what is biologically constructed and what is constructed by the meanings of the language we are born into. She does this with wryness, with irony, with passionate hope, with a whole range of emotions that include doubt and the understanding that some dreams fail. Like Wendy Mulford's, her poems are not always easy, and demand time spent looking at them, but they amply repay the effort.

Michele Roberts

CHILDREN'S BOOKS

THE FRAMING OF THE FEMALE

by Pat Barr

(Kestrel £2.95)

As an attempt to explain the women's movement and to indicate to young people some of the possible implications for their lives, this book is a non-starter. So divorced is the information (most of it chunks from other people's books) from anything to do with the intellectual and emotional upheavals of women's liberation and so lacking in inner conviction that if we weren't told in the introduction that the author is a member of Women in Media, one could only conclude that it was written by someone quite uninvolved with feminist issues.

The history, ideas and struggles of the movement come across as endless regurgitations of ill-digested information, all of which gets equal measure. The crucial events and significant ideas that contributed to make thousands of women radically change their lives are buried. Such basic information as the seven demands of the women's movement is not included.

Instead we are told that Margaret Thatcher's position of "undoubted authority and prestige . . . must have a beneficial and eye-opening effect on other world leaders"; Marie Stopes is described as "that brilliant and courageous lady"; people with whom the author agrees are "wide-awake" or "level-headed".

Teachers and others working with young people and keen to find an introduction to feminism should give this book a wide berth. The best bets are still *Male and Female* by Anne Jones, Jan Marsh and A.G. Watts, (Hobson Press £1.00) and *The Gender Trap*: Book 1 Education and Work, Book 2 Sex and Marriage, Book 3 Messages and Images by Carol Adams and Rae Laurikietis (Virago £1.25 each) - none of which

get a mention in Pat Barr's bibliography.

NEW PAPERBACKS

AURORA AND THE LITTLE BLUE CAR

by Anne-Cath Vestly

(Puffin 60p)

A non-sexist story book for children of about five, this is the sequel to *Hello Aurora!* and continues the story of Aurora and her baby brother who are looked after by their father while their mother goes out to work. Lots of domestic detail and father passing his driving test.

JENNY AND THE SHEEP THIEVES

by Griselda Gifford

(Puffin 50p)

For 8-10 year olds *Jenny and the Sheep Thieves* has nine-year-old Jenny convalescing at her grandparents' farm and making friends with children from a new town nearby. Courageous and independent, Jenny helps to catch some sheep thieves and is a refreshing addition to the small number of non-sexist characters in books for this age range.

Rosemary Stones
Children's Rights Workshop

MUSIC



Elkie Brooks

... As seen on the record cover



... and Bonnie Tyler

considerate man
Going to hold on to you
just as hard as I can . . .
and even
Here alone in my room
Gazing up at the shining
moon . . .

SHOOTING STAR

Elkie Brooks

(A&M)

A bland and predictable LP which doesn't let Elkie Brooks go at all. Side one starts with a likeable but too laid back rendering of Neil Young's 'Only Love Can Break Your Heart' and side two with another familiar, Stevie Wonder's 'As', spoilt by a too sweet and tinkly piano until it swings into the speedy rock beat of the second half, which she does well.

Some of the lyrics are excruciating:

You're so attractive but
you're nice with it too . . .
You're such a kind and

Unfortunately some of the worst are in the few songs she wrote herself. 'Be Positive' sounds like a lesson in all-American positive-thinking: *Be positive and good things will follow* she sings cheerily and you resent bopping 'positively' along.

The publicity blurb makes much of her 16 years of downing double brandies and 'paying dues' since she started trailing round pubs and clubs in Manchester, gaining the life experience that makes her voice "virile", full of "clawing grit"—one of those singers who "can get inside a song and make the words talk, when they believe those words to be worth singing with feeling". ▶

These words aren't though and she doesn't, just makes easy listening for a sunny Saturday afternoon.

Jill Nicholls

NATURAL FORCE

Bonnie Tyler

(RCA)

Another British woman rock singer making it at the moment is Bonnie Tyler, from Swansea. Her husky voice sounds oddly like Rod Stewart's—I almost thought her hit single 'It's a Heartache' was his at first, but it's definitely female. All her originality lies in that voice, and it's enough to make me like her new LP. I love the plaintive sob with the rough edge, though I admit that it's repetitively used and that most of the lyrics are male-identified-woman-pulp. She sings mainly about rejection, usually he of her, occasionally she of him, which really brings out the sob:

*Blame me, I was so lost
inside his arms
Was so blind inside his arms
I couldn't see
Baby I'm sorry.*

The worst—Mike Heron's 'Baby Goodnight'—makes you wince; the best have that universal love song feel, haunting, out-of-this-world:

*Love songs last longer
Than lovers ever do
So baby let me sing a
love song for you.
I like that.*

Then there's the rockers—'Heaven', Stevie Wonder's 'Living in the City'—which she says she prefers. I'm not sure who RCA are aiming her at. They describe a past as a cashier in a sweet-shop, as a housewife "singing into the end of a vacuum cleaner, dreaming of appearing on Top of the Pops", as a nightclub discovery. She still sits somewhere between Top of the Pops and Talk of the Town. I hope she doesn't get lost in smooch.

Jill Nicholls

HEXENSABBAT

—Irene Schweitzer

(Free Music Productions)

Irene Schweitzer is a Swiss jazz pianist who often chooses a solo context in which to explore and extend the possibilities of the instrument. Her new LP *Hexensabbat* (Witch's Sabbath) has one side recorded at a concert and one in the studio.

She has an extraordinarily strong sense of structure, even when playing completely improvised music, using both repetition and transformation of musical ideas and often turning on a sixpence from very free sections to familiar idioms, like a broken up version of something sounding suspiciously like Fats Waller's 'Shortening Bread'.

Some of the pieces concentrate on particular aspects of her playing, like the different sounds of the first, made by drumsticks and things put on the strings. If that approach smacks of the more raucous avant garde, the results—fast, taut rhythms made up of both straight notes and other sounds or interweaving lines each with a different timbre—certainly don't.

The six short pieces of the second side have more concise structure. European influences are evident in the repeated, almost obsessional, figures of 'Choix Mixed' and 'Dykes on Bikes' and the quirky Poulenc-like melody of 'Lavender Waltz'.

Irene Schweitzer is working in an area of music which has few women exponents and which presents its own particular aesthetic question for women, who sometimes feel there is nothing very feminist about playing music which is not immediately accessible. However, Irene Schweitzer has drawn on the musical traditions she has grown up with to produce a music which is both experimental and warmly communicative. Lindsay Cooper



PAM ISHERWOOD

An unnamed band of women from the old Jam Today, the Feminist Improvisation Group and elsewhere played together for the first time at the London Women's

Liberation Conference at the end of June. The music was amazing—free form with strong underlying rhythms we could dance and move to, ending with a wail and blast of voice and saxophone.

Members of the Coventry Lesbian Theatre Group reworked the images of 'Gloria'. First seen at Birmingham in April, they show us painfully familiar WLM/Lesbian scenes, just exaggerated enough to let us laugh. Now four of the eight women are leaving Coventry—any woman who'd like to join the group and keep it working, phone Lou, Coventry 441993.

Jill and Pam

THEATRE

Usually we try to review plays that are likely to tour the country and will be seen by a wide audience... however, this month we are commenting on a number of plays that deserve a mention even though they may not be touring.

THE TRIBADES

by Per Olof Enquist

A wonderful portrait by a man of another male playwright (Strindberg) who realises he is no longer the centre of attention for the women in his life—that they have needs too, and can love each other more than him. Although Strindberg is a rabid misogynist, in the play

at least he understands why he's become obsolete. It is witty—"When she feels low she visits a cemetery. Reading the names of the dead men cheers her up"—and it shows beautiful and strong women together. It's splendid.

Ruth Wallsgrove

PLENTY

by David Hare

Plenty reveals the cynicism worn by aging young playwrights as dignity.

David Hare cleverly exploits the currency of female protagonists by seducing the audience with his hero's attractive idealism only to reveal her social conscience and personal vision as symptoms of madness. The lead part, the resistance worker, is

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stunningly portrayed by Kate Nelligan — she finds solidarity and purpose in World War Two, then proceeds through the boring 1950's and the hyperbolic 1960's with a discontent which Hare turns to petulance. Her independent traits, which we first identify as feminist, sour into bitchiness. Hare shows how uppity women damage themselves as well as sensible citizens who have learned to cope in this absurdist world.

That Hare himself has learned to cope is evidenced in the sexism and liberal politics of *Plenty* compared to his more progressive *Fanshen* of several years ago. Cynicism, it seems, is the proper attire for ex-radicals at the National.

Valerie Miner

TISSUE

by Louise Page

Sally (Elizabeth Revill) had a breast off. We see incidents from her life before and after the operation, acted on a clinical white plinth. Reactions from family, lovers, doctors, nurses and so on, are given with subtlety by Kate Crutchley and Michael Cassidy, who complete the small cast briskly directed by Nancy Diuguid.

The play is the first in live theatre to deal with breast cancer and mastectomy, and important for the information it gives. In the discussion afterwards I had my first feel of false breasts, as tangibly dramatic an experience as any moment in the play. We also saw a 'Poisette' brochure, declaring that, with the loss of a breast,

a woman must accept that she has lost part of her femininity. This is a particularly horrific way of promoting their products and the play carefully countered this sort of attitude.

Ultimately, I felt that perhaps Sally's emotional state had not been dealt

with boldly enough, and there were moments when my imagination lay dormant as I was spoon fed the facts. Nonetheless, a worthy production.

Joanna Klaces

Tissue transfers to the ICA Theatre, London July 25–August 12 (1.15pm)



LAWRENCE SPARHAM (IFL)

We can't pay? — We won't pay!

WE CAN'T PAY?—

WE WON'T PAY

by Dario Fo

Hordes of Italian women out shopping in the local supermarket one day decide that enough is enough—they loot the shelves indiscriminately, refuse to pay for their goodies and return home to be faced with the problem of how to hide all these cucumbers and tins of dog food from their very straight and honest Communist Party hubbies! With this start you could expect the play to slow down but it doesn't... Frances de la Tour's brilliantly funny performance only just overshadows the rest of the cast in what must be the farce of the year... oh yes, the women are also refusing to pay their gas, electricity and rent bills! There's more to it, of course, but for me at least it was tremendously encouraging to see a few of my day-to-day fantasies acted out on stage.

Carole Spedding

Belt & Braces Roadshow Theatre Company, may tour this play, with a different cast, later this year. (Details 01-267 6722)

THE CLUB

by Eve Merriam

Eve Merriam's compilation of turn-of-the-century songs, sketches and jokes is set in an exclusive white male American club, complete with page and black 'boy'. The soiree works entirely within the cabaret conventions, playing on its audience's expectations,

starting out with anti-woman jokes alongside women-as-rose songs. As the show progresses, the convention itself is not only satirised, but its underlying assumptions about male and femaleness undermined by the fact that it has an all-female cast. The intentions are subtle rather than revolutionary; the effect superb. The material is a goldmine, but it is the feminist perspective (and 'feminist' is still a grubby word in British theatre) which provides the bite.

Micheline Victor

(thanks to Time Out)

THE ELOCUTION OF BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

by Steve J Spears

A one man show, superbly acted by Gordon Chater about an ironic transvestite who teaches elocution by day and loves Mick Jagger by night. But he leaves his curtains open one night too often...

The first act is funny, while frightening and fast; the invisible characters being a precocious boy (Benjamin Franklin) who flirts and shocks him... and makes him laugh, and a prissy stockbroker who insists on being called Belinda. The second act is a plea for tolerance that leaves you feeling hopeless and down in spite of the memory of Chater scrambling to close the curtains in full campy, reliving John Wayne recapturing Iwo Jima. But it's a play worth seeing, the production is faultless... a stage manager's dream!

Carole Spedding



The dreams of 'perhapers'...

THE SINGULAR LIFE OF ALBERT NOBBS

adapted by Simone Benmussa

Singular Albert Nobbs gives up her personal life, her very identity as a woman, to earn a living wage as a waiter. Until a woman passing as a male housepainter, another 'perhaper', tells her she could set up house with a woman

and find happiness. But the dreams of the perhapers, and a prostitute Albert meets by the Liffey — of loving, sunsets over meadows, and of comfortable little shops—clash with the desire for being 'in love' and manly kisses in 'normal' women... And Albert dies alone, spurned. It's the saddest, most haunting play I've ever seen.

Ruth Wallsgrove

What did the actress say to the director?

Julie Holledge, a member of the Feminist Theatre Group, describes why women are changing their role in the acting profession.

The eighteen year old actress stripped naked, sat astride a faintly embarrassed actor, groaned into the camera and simulated a perfect cinematic orgasm. The director was delighted by her performance.

This incident, which occurred a few weeks ago during the shooting of a new British film, perfectly illustrates how women are employed to create the images which are used to oppress them in every day life. Two years ago the Feminist Theatre Study Group was set up so that women performers could explore and expose this contradiction.

We, the women who were at the first meeting, had seen each other perform on stage or had met before in the competitive milieu of auditions, but we had never talked together about our experiences as women working in the entertainments industry.

"Every girl would like to be the fairy on the Christmas tree"

Most of us had fallen in love with the theatre at an age when the only alternatives presented to us were the typewriter, bed-pan, or kitchen sink. At that time we believed The Actress to be a woman freed from the shackles of family life, living in a world filled with sexual and financial power. And for those of us who could remember the lines of the school play and not bump into the furniture, fantasy became reality with a place at a drama school — which was all too quickly followed by a place in the dole queue. In an industry with 90 per cent unemployment an actress can reckon on working three months of the year for approximately £50 a week. The rest of the year is spent at auditions competing with hundreds of other women to play some 'nagging wife'

or 'blond bombshell'. Slowly, all ideals disappear in the fight for a soap-flake or chocolate bar commercial.

As an alternative to this rat-race, many of us now work for the socialist theatre companies in what is commonly known as the Fringe. Most of the plays performed by these companies are still full of stereotyped wives, mothers and whores, who exist merely to provide a colourful background to the hero's struggle with villainous capitalism. A few of us are lucky enough to work with the new feminist companies but our Arts Council grants are painfully inadequate and the number of jobs available ridiculously small.

Keeping young and beautiful

Initially our monthly meetings were a sort of consciousness raising group for women theatre workers. For the first time we found we could relax, stop competing with each other, expose our vulnerabilities and laugh at them. We talked about the constant pressure to 'keep young and beautiful' if you want to work; Jo's agent issued her with an ultimatum to "change the shape of your bum"; Di suffered the humiliation of a film test to see if she was beautiful enough to play a part in a TV drama; while Anna was starved and drugged for three weeks by a film director who wanted to eliminate her flab for his sex scenes. In a job in which the ability to simulate copulation is a highly prized and much exploited skill, it is essential to conform to a male image of female beauty and sexuality. Incidentally, we discovered that one of the TV companies has a 'modesty rule' which prevents men, but not women, from appearing naked in the studio; all men are provided with transparent, elasticated briefs which crush their genitals in eye-catching heaps across their stomachs.



"This is me photographed at a feminist theatre group meeting. If I sent this photo to any employer they wouldn't even interview me."

—Sue Glanville

There's no business like . . .

Over 100 women came to the meetings during our first year. We criticised each other's work, discussed specific shows, thought how we could define 'feminist theatre', and listened to the day-to-day problems of women performers and technicians. Many of us had had no previous experience of women's groups and were amazed at the feelings of support generated by the meetings. After many hours discussing our mutual oppression, we began to look at ways to fight the sexism that surrounds us. But as individuals it is impossible for us to change the content of our work unless we have reached the top of the theatrical hierarchy. Take the background story to a major TV drama series which was broadcast last year: in one of the episodes a woman was forced into an abortion by her husband, who suspected he was not the father of her child. In the original script it was the woman who demanded the abortion and the right to decide whether or not to bear children, but the leading actor, who happened to be a devout Roman Catholic, insisted on the script change. When one of the lesser actors questioned the rewrite the director walked out of rehearsals. Even in socialist theatre groups individual women who question the sexism in plays are frequently accused of wasting time and, in extreme cases, have been sacked for disturbing the smooth running of a company. To fight this kind of sexism we knew we had to work together, but the group was divided over whether we should transform ourselves into an action group or remain a support and friendship network. We resolved this dilemma by



"If I'm going to get work in commercial theatre I have to conform to a male image of female beauty. I don't identify with the 'glamour' image but if you want to be employed you have to sell yourself." —Sue Glanville

confining the monthly Sunday meetings to consciousness raising and creating a separate steering committee, with weekly meetings, to organise campaigns. Our first target was our union — Equity.

... Equity business

We put forward a candidate on a purely feminist platform for the union's general council (she polled 231 votes) and campaigned for over a year for the establishment of an official women's sub-committee. In May the committee was convened with a brief to research into, and prepare a document on sex discrimination in the theatre. At the Annual General Meeting in June we tried to give this committee some teeth by proposing a motion that a special women's organiser be appointed in the union and that in all future negotiations the issue of the treatment of women in, and by, the media be raised. Another motion demanding childcare facilities in our places of work was proposed by a woman from our group; her anger over this issue had been sparked off by a Royal Shakespeare Company director who had refused to offer her a part on the grounds that it was her duty to stay at home and look after her child. Both motions were carried virtually unanimously, but in Equity this means little or nothing as the

decisions of an Annual General Meeting are not binding on the general council.

Zapping sexist shows

Although we are confident that our fight in the union will improve the position of women in our industry, it will have no immediate effect on the representation of women in the media. To tackle the sexism we portray, rather than the sexism we experience, we have formed an action group. Armed with our multi-purpose, anti-sexist shows leaflet, we meet one evening a week to go to a West End or Fringe theatre. After the performance, if we think it necessary, we leaflet the audience. We are reluctant to interrupt our fellow theatre workers during a performance, as they are all too often the puppets of writers, directors and managements. Instead we try and talk to them after the show and explain why we find their material sexist.

We feel this is just the beginning of a long struggle to control the images we use our skills to create — so if, by chance, the next time you go to a theatre you see a group of women leafleting or picketing, please join us — we need your help. ■

If you want to know more about our group or would like to receive our monthly newsletter — write to 95 Barnsbury Street, London N1.

DID THE CHARACTERS IN THIS PLAY IMPLY THAT:

- BLONDES ARE DUMB?
- WIVES NAG?
- FEMINISTS ARE FRUSTRATED?
- WHORES HAVE HEARTS OF GOLD?
- MOTHERS IN LAW INTERFERE?
- LESBIANS ARE AGGRESSIVE?
- INTELLECTUAL WOMEN ARE FRIGID?
- WOMEN WHO ENJOY SEX ARE NYMPHOMANIACS?
- OLDER WOMEN ARE SEXLESS?

DO YOU THINK THESE STEREOTYPES ACCURATELY REFLECT THE LIVES AND PERSONALITIES OF HALF THE POPULATION?

WE DON'T.

WE ARE A GROUP OF THEATRE WORKERS WHO ARE TIRED OF PORTRAYING THESE CARDBOARD CUT-OUTS.

WE WANT THEATRE MANAGERS, DIRECTORS AND WRITERS TO STOP PRODUCING PLAYS WHICH INSULT WOMEN.

DEMAND A THEATRE WHICH REFLECTS THE REALITY OF OUR LIVES.

HELP US - LEAFLET - PROTEST - BOYCOTT SEXIST SHOWS

RING 607 6070 OR 452 4942 OR 624 5343 FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Feminist Theatre group leaflet

MATCHGIRLS IGNITE

Ninety years ago in
July women Match-Makers
went on strike in London.

Sue Roalman looks at
the reasons for their
walkout and
Annie Besant's part in
the proceedings.

At a pedestrian crossing in Bow Road, near Bow Church, stands a 16-foot statue erected to Gladstone. Inscribed on the plinth as 'the gift of Mr. Theodore Bryant', it had been paid for with the sweat of his workers—then, as now, popularly called the Match Girls.

It was 90 years ago this July 5 that the mainly female labour force at Bryant and May struck for better conditions, all 1,300 of them. The statue—to which they had been forced to 'contribute' a shilling each from their meagre wages—had been one of their many grievances. When it was erected near the Fairfield Road, Bow match factory where they worked,

"...so furious were the girls at this cruel plundering, that many went to the unveiling of the statue with stones and bricks in their pockets, and I was conscious of a wish that some of those bricks had made an impression on Mr. Bryant's conscience.

Later on they surrounded the statue—'we paid for it' they cried savagely—shouting and yelling, and a gruesome story is told that some cut their arms and let their blood trickle on the marble paid for, in very truth, by their blood."

This comes from an article by Annie Besant, called 'White Slavery in London' in the Socialist paper, *Link* on July 23, 1888, which she co-edited. It was virtually the strike sheet for the matchworkers during the next three weeks of their struggle. She had written the article after attending a Fabian Society lecture which pinpointed Bryant and May as one of many culprits, who underpaid their workers while exacting huge profits. After visiting the Fairfield Road factory with Herbert Burrows, and interviewing several of the matchworkers, Annie wrote her scathing attack, which particularly castigated management for allowing 23 percent dividends to shareholders, while workers frequently toiled 12 hours a day, six days a week, for a weekly take home pay of 4 or 6 shillings. But, the article continued, the work was not only arduous and poorly paid, it was

also deadly. Since the early 1860s, investigators for the Children's Employment Commission had noted that white phosphorous—the chief ingredient in match-making—was a potentially lethal health hazard. In a report of the time, a Commission investigator commented that fumes from the chemical, during a factory inspection, "had turned every gold or silver article about his person... completely black." (*The Queen*, 23 October, 1875). As for those with no gold or silver gleaming about their person, the effect of breathing hot phosphorous fumes daily over a period of years could not be polished away. 'Phossy jaw' a necrosis of the lower jaw, was a common complaint of matchmakers. It could—and often did—result in death, following initial symptoms of aching, swelling, loss of teeth and general lassitude. In advanced stages, whole sections of rotted bone could be pulled from the jaw, as easily as a loose milk tooth. The seasonable nature of match work (with greatest employment during time of greatest demand, in winter) was a mixed blessing; for although it meant job insecurity, it also allowed a legion of matchmakers the closest to a 'rest cure' they would ever get—hop and fruit picking in the country, during the summer months. Indeed, the immediate response of 600 Bryant and May workers—once the strike had closed their firm—was to drift into the country for a summer of hop-picking. The 700 remaining stuck it out.

The sequence of events, following publication of the 'White Slavery' article, was swift and sensational. The immediate interest it roused in the national press, was largely because the highly popularized and enigmatic figure of Annie Besant was championing the cause. The firm threatened a libel suit. Annie Besant, confident of her facts, challenged them to go ahead with it. They didn't, instead, the directors of the firm, Frederick and Wilberforce Bryant, vociferously denied the



Homeworkers were paid 2d for 144 boxes. Each match-box consisted of six separate parts. The most common type of match was called the 'Lucifer'—a non-safety match larger than the contemporary 'Swan Vestas'. It was so combustible it could be struck alight anywhere, and inevitably many fires broke out. Safety matches were invented during the First World War in the USA, but Britain was almost the last place to change over.

Below: Strike Committee of the Match-Makers Union with Annie Besant in the white dress with black collar, and Herbert Burrows next to her.



Link article allegations, that their employees were fined for such things as having dirty feet, talking while working, or leaving burnt matches at their work bench. They further denied published accounts that one girl appearing late for work, had been shut out for half a day, and docked half her daily earnings. They refuted charges that another employee had been fined one shilling for letting the web of her machine twist, in an effort to save her fingers being cut, only to be told, "take care of the machine, never mind your fingers". Finally they ignored or denied the published complaints of matchworkers, who said the cost of their materials was deducted from their wages.

The dispute intensified two weeks after the article appeared, when the firm tried to coerce the matchworkers into signing a written statement repudiating the facts of the article. All of them refused to sign. In retaliation, the firm sacked three suspected 'informers'. So the entire workforce of Bryant and May walked out. Their first port of call was the Fleet St. office of Annie Besant, where, because of cramped space, a delegation went in to see her, and spell out the latest developments. A few days later, a procession of several hundred marched to the Houses of Parliament; this time a delegation of about a dozen, including Annie Besant and Herbert Burrows, were received in a committee room, to outline the issue to M.P.'s. Meanwhile, back at the factory, the directors, threatened to import scab labour from Glasgow, or to move the entire factory to Norway. They did neither.

There is little doubt that the strike would have failed—like numerous unorganised and unpublished walk-outs during this time—had it not been for Annie Besant. She was able to draw attention to the Match Girls' grievances, not so much from any deep affinity she had developed with them, but more through the notoriety she had gained in championing 'causes' that scandalized Victorian propriety.

A decade earlier, for instance, she had incurred the wrath of her minister husband Frank—who incidentally had pocketed her first literary earnings, and was said to have physically abused her—by writing *Freethinker* pamphlets denying the deity of Jesus Christ. Although published anonymously, their authorship got back to Frank, who promptly gained legal separation from his wife. A few years later, after adopting a neo-Malthusian line on birth control (which basically argued that the labouring classes should control their procreation), Annie Besant was at the centre of an infamous court case for having published information on the subject. As a result she lost the custody of her daughter Mabel to Frank on the grounds that she was an unfit mother.

Given her experience with men of the cloth, Annie was to make short shrift of the 50-odd clergymen whose names were amongst the share-holders at Bryant and May. Her animosity effectively cloaked in Victorian sentiment, she wrote:



Procession of Match-Makers to Westminster

TO THE SHAREHOLDERS OF BRYANT AND MAY

Do you know that girls are used to carry boxes on their heads til the hair is rubbed off, and the young heads are bald at 15 years of age? Country clergyman with shares in Bryant and May's draw down on your knee your 15-year-old daughter; pass your hand tenderly over the silky clustering curls, rejoicing in the dainty beauty of the thick shining tresses. Then, like a ghastly vision, let there rise up before you the pale worn face of another man's 15-year-old daughter, with wistful patient eyes, and see her as . . . she pulls off her battered hat and shews a head robbed of its hair by the constant rubbing of the carried boxes, robbed thereof that your dividends may be the larger, Sir Cleric, by the price of pads that might have saved for her the grace of a womanhood already slaved out of beauty. (*Link*, 14 July 1888.)

Annie Besant also helped organise strike pay for the workers, through appeals in *Link* and with donations from the London Trades Council. She had the issue raised in Parliament through her life-long friend and colleague, the M.P. Charles Bradlaugh, author of the 1886 Truck Act which gave employees rights against their employers for unfair practices. Finally, within two weeks of the walk out, having won widespread publicity and support, the grievances of the match girls were successfully negotiated through the London Trades Council.

Apart from gaining only minimal wage increases, the strikers had won all their other demands: the firm held to their promise of 'no victimization' for any of the strikers, they agreed to abolish all fines, previously imposed for dirty feet, talking, and other misdemeanors; they agreed to cancel all deductions made for

the paints, brushes and stamps of the home workers; agreed to the formation of a Match-Makers' Union—organised jointly by Annie Besant, Herbert Burrows, and the Women's Trade Union League—which ten years later came to the aid of women at Bell's Match Factory, in a similar dispute about working conditions. Annie Besant served for several years as Honorary Secretary to the Union, which had 600 members by November, 1888.

Finally, the firm agreed to provide a separate eating room for employees, to minimise the dangers of contracting phossy jaw. Still, the disease was not thoroughly eliminated until 1908, when Parliament banned white phosphorous from use in match-making. Until then it remained a grave danger in the trade, judging from case histories printed in the *Women's Trade Union Journal* at the turn of the century.

A few months after the strike, Annie Besant reaped the political harvest of her involvement with the matchmakers; she was overwhelmingly elected to the School Board of Tower Hamlets on a ticket advocating secular education and free school meals. She won 15,926 from a total of 16,939 votes cast—3,000 more than her closest rival. She had wanted to stand in the London County Council elections, but because of legal difficulties about women Councillors, contented herself with the School Board.

As for the matchmakers, their personal testimony of the struggle scarcely exists today. Their words have been distorted and even entirely destroyed through the accounts of others. The current publicity pamphlet on workings conditions at Bryant and May simply states, "The high standards set a century ago have been maintained ever since". ■

Thanks to Anna Davin who loaned her research material for this article, and to the Local History Library, Bancroft Road, London E1.

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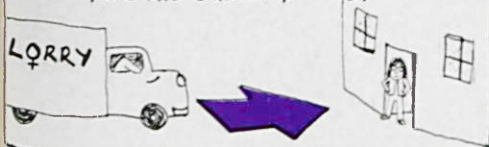


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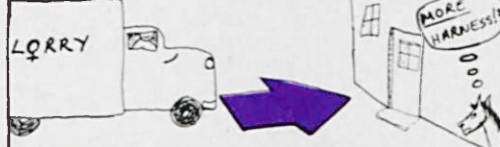


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